Tamara Dlugach

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"For Truth it is enough for it to be accepted by a few men, be they good men: Truth is not called upon to be pleasing to everyone."

"Since I am less inclined to instruct you than to train your mind, it matters little whether you adopt my ideas or reject them, provided they engage your whole attention. A man more skilled than I will teach you to understand the forces of Nature; for me it is enough to have made you test out your own strength."

Denis Diderot

PREFACE

I was very happy to learn that English readers will have the opportunity to acquaint themselves with my work on Diderot, one of the most remarkable figures of the Enlightenment who deserves our admiration and detailed study.

The life of Diderot is the story of a courageous man who dared to oppose the royal court and the government of Louis XV, who did not fear incarceration in the Bastille, the threat of arrest and confiscation of property; it is the life of a champion to whose efforts we owe the publication of the famous *Encyclopédie.*

Without Diderot, this *Encyclopédie* would probably never have seen the light of day. We can, moreover, be certain that, without Diderot's indomitable spirit and confidence in the victory of advanced thought, we would not have inherited those volumes of the *Encyclopédie* which, after the departure of Jean d'Alembert, he, together with a small group of likeminded helpers, prepared, edited and published right up until 1772 in an atmosphere of government threats and public harassment. And had there been no *Encyclopédie,* it is

quite possible that the development of the bourgeois system in France (and elsewhere) would have been retarded, and the whole of the cultural development of Europe would perhaps have been somewhat different.

We know Diderot not only as the organiser of the *Encyclopêdie*: together with Holbach, Helvétius and Rousseau he took part in elaborating the programme for the French Revolution, of which the *Encyclopédie* was the philosophical basis. Every article in the *Encyclopédie*, written or edited by Diderot, is a blow against absolutism and feudal-estate psychology. It was here, in this circle of Encyclopaedist friends, that the basic concepts of the philosophy of the Enlightenment were hammered out—the concepts of natural man, of equality, of justice, and others. The relations that emerged among the members of this group, in many ways thanks to Diderot's efforts, promoted debate and argument, and this, in its turn, encouraged that scope of thought and detailed analysis of the problems without which the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment could not have been formulated.

Thanks to the clarity of his thinking, the precision of his argumentation, the range of his knowledge, his warmth, friendliness and optimism, Diderot became the soul of the circle of the Encyclopaedists.

Diderot's philosophical ideas were in the mainstream of the ideas of the Enlightenment: as an adherent of its radical left wing, he developed the materialist concepts of the primacy of matter over consciousness, support-

ed the principle of the eternal and indestructible nature of motion, criticised the sensuous idealism of Berkeley and formulated an atheistic outlook. Although his socio-political programme was less revolutionary than that of Rousseau, although he defended the idea of the enlightened monarch, which was widespread among those who agreed with Enlightenment philosophy, he nonetheless began, in the last years of his life and in particular after closer acquaintance with Catherine II, to think of the possible forcible overthrow of tyranny. In this he is a direct predecessor of the French Revolution.

Diderot is not only known as a philosopher, public figure and publicist, but is also justifiably famous as a writer: his belletristic works were admired by Goethe and Schiller; Marx listed him among favourite prose writers. The well-known dialogues in "Le Neveu de Rameau" and "Jacques le fataliste et son maître" still evoke the admiration of the reader.

UNESCO declared 1984 to be the Year of Diderot, and on 31 July, 1984, progressive people round the world marked the 200th anniversary of his posthumous recognition and fame. Jubilee meetings were held in a number of towns in France (Paris, Langres, Sevres) and other countries, attended by well-known experts on the works of Diderot (Herbert Dieckmann, Jacques Proust and others), at which many important results of the work done by this renowned French enlightener were identified and analysed.

The author of this present monograph has

focused her attention only on one aspect of Diderot's work: she has attempted to grasp those specific aspects of Diderot's thinking which many researchers into his work have described as "Socratean". This is a reference to Diderot's thinking as a philosopher who, unlike many of his famous contemporaries, did not attempt to construct a complete philosophical system; on the contrary, he sought to identify the internal contradictions within the systems of Holbach, Helvétius and others. He did this quite deliberately, seeking to show that the thinking of his age was typified by so-called "paradoxes", that is, by insoluble contradictions, a situation in which, when the basic postulates of Enlightenment philosophy were developed in a logically consistent, non-contradictory manner, they led, strange as it may seem, to the opposite conclusions, that is, they brought into question these very postulates.

Thus Diderot shows that, if the Enlightenment concept of man as a "natural being" who has received all his qualities and characteristics from Nature is taken to its logical conclusion, then it must be admitted that flaws of human character, and even human vices, are determined by Nature. Then one cannot accuse or punish, for Nature itself has determined these flaws. This threatens the thesis which posits the rationality of all that is "natural". It also threatens another major principle of the Enlightenment—the principle of upbringing.

Indeed, if a man is "good" by nature, then he has no need of upbringing; if, on the other hand, he is "evil" by nature, then upbringing will serve no purpose as Nature, in the words

of Diderot, "will still have its way".

The Enlighteners would not have been the Enlighteners, however, if they had not insisted on the possibility of changing man by upbringing. But can one do so otherwise than in harmony with Nature? Can upbringing "overcome" Nature in cases where Nature is flawed, evil, and in general imperfect? And if it can, then does not Nature cease to be the sole basis of human life and the measure of all human actions, since alongside Nature there is now upbringing, recognised as being even more powerful?

In just this way contradictions are revealed in the solutions offered by the enlighteners to other problems connected with the new philosophical view of the essence of man and his place in nature.

The author of the present monograph seeks to show that the famous philosophical dialogues in *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Jacques le fataliste...* are devoted to revealing precisely such "paradoxes", and that therefore the "hero" of these novels may justifiably be considered to be the thinking of the age, taken together with all its "paradoxes". Hence the incessant and sharp argument of the characters with each other and themselves, and their sudden shift to the opposing side; hence Diderot's love for the dialogue form of narration.

We know that Hegel thought highly of Diderot's work, in particular of *Le Neveu de Rameau,* and included the fruits of his reflections on this work in his *Phenomenology of Mind* in the form of a chapter on "unhappy" consciousness and "pure" consciousness. Hegel

named Diderot as one of his precursors in the elaboration of dialectics. Nonetheless, in the opinion of the author of the present monograph, the dialectics of Diderot is clearly not of a Hegelian nature: there is no identification of opposites in the Hegelian meaning of this term, nor any "removal" (solution) of these contradictions.

Diderot places the emphasis on the constant reproduction of the logical opposition of thesis and antithesis in the course of argumentation, each time at a new level of development. Again and again, the complete logical elaboration of the thesis brings with it the antithesis, and vice versa. Therefore Diderot's "paradoxes" can be seen as closer to Kant's unresolved antinomies than to Hegel's identity of opposites.

It is along these lines that Diderot's fundamental works on philosophy and aesthetics are analysed in this book, with particular attention being given to his *Salons* and *Paradoxe sur le comédien.*

The author is proud and happy of the fact that she is making her own contribution, albeit modest, to contemporary research into the works of Diderot and thereby paying tribute to one who was a remarkable thinker, an extraordinary man and a courageous fighter.

If this book gives pleasure to the English reader, the author will consider that she has, in part at least, achieved her purpose.

CHAPTER ONE

FRANCE UNDER LOUIS XV AND THE *ENCYCLOPÈDIE* OF DENIS DIDEROT

The figure of Liberty on the barricades in the famous picture by Eugène Delacroix serves to symbolize insurgent Paris.

The "barricades", the "storming of the Bastille" and the "French Revolution" are phrases that have been familiar to us since our school-days. For each and every one of us they conjure up vivid stirring images. We imagine to ourselves majestic and amusing episodes of that mighty social tide, which brought down the monarchy, did away with estate privileges and ushered in a new social order.

The whole of the French people rose up against the old order—bourgeoisie, artisans, peasants—and triumphed in the struggle. Yet when we study the revolution it is important to probe deeper than revolutionary gains and not pass over in silence the subject of those who devised the slogans taken up by the insurgents, those who elucidated the urgent tasks before them, in other words those who paved the way to revolution with their ideas and intellectual quests. First and foremost tribute should be paid to what was initially a small group of writers, grouped round the *Encyclopèdie,* who later came to be known as the Encyclopaedists. The central figure in the group was Denis Diderot.

It could be said that he and those who shared his views were most fortunate—they lived at a time when, after a long pause, the independent activity and personal initiative of the individual were coming into their own, namely during the period paving the way to the French Revolution of 1789.

The new age demanded men of a new mould; admittedly human rights had to be constantly fought for and consolidated, but the historical situation at the time provided favourable soil for such developments.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century France presented to the world the picture of an absolute monarchy and a once-powerful aristocracy in decline. Feudal dependence had become a heavy yoke for the peasantry and the burden of taxes was growing, merely so as to support the idle amusements of the feudal lords all competing for influence at the Court. At the beginning of the eighteenth century admittedly the stratification of not only the aristocracy but also the clergy was beginning and this served to consolidate the position of the Third Estate. Impoverished nobles and clerics were little different from the representatives of that new stratum of society, when it came to their way of life, and in particular to the way of life found among the largest and poorest section of that estate. Meanwhile the Court was becoming richer than ever as were the rich aristocracts and the prominent clerics attached to it. To use the words of the famous French historian Hippolyte Taine: "The whole of this world parades itself, eating and drinking copiously

and ceremoniously: this is how they occupy themselves in the main, and they go about it most conscientiously."[1]

Members of the long-standing aristocratic families, even the very rich ones, received enormous pensions and gifts from the king: in the household of almost every prince or other noble hundreds of posts were established that provided salaries and supplementary sources of income, and which did not involve any real duties and only existed for the sake of appearances. The Court was totally corrupt: neither the monarch nor the nobles, nor the clergy any longer performed any useful state functions. They had turned into a parasitic growth on the body of the nation.

D'Argenson, one of the ministers of that period with a more progressive outlook wrote that "the Court has become the senate of the nation; even the most humble valet in Versailles is a senator, maids also take part in government, if not in order to give commands themselves, then at least to stop laws and rules being observed."[2] The aristocrats and leading clerics were exempt from paying taxes: not only were they living at the expense of the Third Estate, but they were growing richer at its expense as well. The poorer members of the nobility, priests and craftsmen were living in poverty and unable to find protection from arbitrary rule.

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[1] H. Taine, *Les origines de la France contemporaine. L'ancien régime,* Librairie Hachette et Cie., Paris, 1882, p. 87.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 93

Taxes still went on rising: as a rule 54 livres taxation had to be paid on every 100 livres (one livre was equal to one pound of silver—*Tr.*) of income, and in some places this figure reached as much as 71 livres, which meant that a man was able to use less than a third of the money he earned. Many of the less prosperous landowners were, in this situation, reduced to the position of ordinary farmers. The peasants were steadily being reduced to the status of beggars: the extent of the taxes they had to pay was enormous. Taxes had to be paid for the right to use various roads, to come to market, per every head of livestock, to pay the salaries of village beadles, etc.

One of the monstrously cruel and senseless taxes was that introduced on salt. After 1680 every person over seven had to buy seven pounds of salt a year, but of those seven pounds not a single ounce could be used for anything else (salting meat, for instance) apart from in cooking. If a peasant were suddenly to take it into his head to start salting pork to provide food for the winter, then he would have to pay dearly for it. Straight away the bailiffs would appear on the scene, take away the pork and sentence him to a fine of 300 livres. A person wishing to salt meat had to go to a special warehouse, buy salt for that purpose and avail himself of a receipt for the purchase of that salt, which he would later be able to present to the tax-collectors and salt inspectors. At any moment a bailiff might appear at a peasant's house, open the side-board and any barrel with fish or corned beef that he might find, test the strength of the pickle, taste the salt in

the peasant's salt-cellar and then proceed to fine any peasant who aroused in him even the slightest suspicion that he might be breaking the rules. Arbitrary punishment of this kind was common-place. It is hardly surprising that as time went on the number of peasant revolts increased.

The Third Estate, oppressed by taxation was unable to survive in the conditions it had been living in previously. It was threatened more and more by the emergence of a new capitalist mode of production—the spread of manufactories and the growth of the number of workers employed in them, which demanded the elimination of feudal dependence and the strengthening of domestic and foreign trade. All these innovations stemmed first and foremost from the growing role of the bourgeoisie, which used to lend large sums to the Court. At that time the bourgeoisie was the only social group which was making and acquiring money and was in a position to make loans to the king and the nobility. As early as 1755 the interest due on the loans made to the state by the bourgeoisie came to 45 million livres and by 1789 this figure had grown to 206 million.

Nevertheless the bourgeoisie was hardly receiving any interest payments, for the government only paid its debts when it so pleased and when it had something to pay with, which was an even rarer event. The bourgeoisie, which was gradually becoming the economic master of the country, was nevertheless virtually deprived of any rights at all, when it came to political matters. In the

1730s this contradiction between the official and actual state of affairs became so acute that the monarchy was in crisis.

The struggle between the social estates, particularly in its early stages, began to acquire religious implications. This could be explained by the fact that right up until the New Age religion had provided the basic form of human community in which the individual could ally himself to a group, and which provided the opportunity for each person to be conscious of himself as part of an extended family or clan. It was precisely for this reason that over a long period any step forward in human history had been taken within the framework of religion, even when, as in this case, the link with religion was only a tenuous one.

The struggle of the various religious movements in France at the beginning of the eighteenth century reflected the particular arrangement of the class forces existing at the time, since the two most violently opposed schools—the Ultramontanists and the Jansenists—were supported by the old privileged classes and the new emergent classes, respectively. Here it is well to dwell on the fact that although the French were a nation of Catholics, the historical situation of that country took shape in such a way that, as the state developed, they were obliged to defend themselves in face of extreme claims pursued by the Pope and they tended to see the strength of the monarchy as a means of defending themselves against Rome. The decline of the monarchy made it imperative for the Court and the King to seek the support of the Catholic clergy, which in

its turn meant a consolidation of the Pope's power. As a result the society of the Jesuits in France, whose interests were rightly seen as identical with those of the tottering Court, provoked hostile attacks from the popular masses.

The Ultramontanists adhered to the views of the Jesuits, while the Jansenists—followers of the Dutch theologian Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638)—tried to wage a struggle against the Jesuits. By doing so they attracted sympathy from all quarters, although the majority of people who supported them, did so without really understanding a word of their theories, merely out of their hatred for Rome and the Jesuits. Although this may seem strange at first glance, the majority of the people drawn directly into this religious struggle gradually abandoned religion in general. One of the most interesting scholars to have studied this period is Felix Rocquain, who attempted to shed light on the reasons behind this phenomenon. "This mocking humour, this doubt, this scepticism born of a surfeit of such disputes came together with the first germs of disbelief ... for the first time men began to refer to their own age as the 'irreligious century'."[1] The advance of social consciousness was taking place against a background of fierce disputes between the various schools of thought.

In 1715-1733 the class struggle in France found expression in religious issues, above all those centred round the famous papal Bull of Clement XI (Unigenitus Dei Filius). Confes-

[1] Felix Rocquain, *L'Esprit révolutionnaire avant la révolution. 1715-1789*, Plon et Cie., Paris., 1878, p. 81.

sors were called upon to deny the sacrament to those who did not accept the contents of this Bull (for a long time afterwards this provided a cause of contention and unrest). From the early 1730s onwards, however, the interests of the nation began to find expression in the secular struggle between the Court, the Parliament and the people. In this struggle Parliament took upon itself the role of that upper stratum of the bourgeoisie which in its clashes with the monarchy always opts for compromise when there is any serious threat of danger in the air from the increasingly strong Third Estate. Within Parliament ideologists were gradually emerging prominent writers and philosophers. The appearance of a particular group of writers in the forefront of public life stemmed from the enormous importance which the written word played in the political struggle of France at that time, an importance that has yet to be adequately explained. Religious feuds gradually gave way to "battles of books" which were no longer being waged in connection with religious interests.

It may be said with every justification that in that period books became the spiritual weapon of the masses. It was precisely in philosophical books that the political struggle was focused, and they were read with keen interest by a very wide range of people, who gradually began to appreciate the close link between the philosophical thesis presenting experience as the source of human knowledge, the assertion of the equality of all men everywhere and the renunciation of all kinds

of privilege. Following on this, Parliament, aware of the threat this represented for the old order, decided to burn philosophical books along with those which attacked religion. Real bonfires were lit in Paris to this end from 1715 onwards. At the same time Parliament itself was indirectly promoting the spread of atheistic and materialist views, since before each book was burnt the executioner would publicly announce the nature of its contents and bring against it the quite specific accusations that had been drawn up by the Conseil d'Etat. From the 1730s onwards the philosophical works that went up in flames included such immortal creations of the human spirit as Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* (their author was accused of spreading dissipation that was a most dangerous threat to religion and public order); Diderot's *Pensées sur l'interpretation de la Nature* (Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature); Rousseau's *Emile;* Helvétius' treatise *De l'Esprit* (Essays on the Mind) and many others besides.

The burning of these books did not do away with the ideas expressed in them, but rather the opposite: it made the books and the ideas more popular. The banned books were quickly copied or reprinted in secret and then disseminated, although the government made this offense subject to large fines and sent the offenders to prison. Such books were printed in Holland and then sent back to France: the situation even reached the ridiculous point when they could be acquired for a few sous right outside Parliament. Indeed, Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (Persian Letters)

could be bought there twenty years before official permission was granted for their publication. Voltaire, who was living in Ferney at the time, deliberately had his books published in small format so that they could easily be copied and distributed.

The demand for philosophical and sociopolitical literature became a public need, and the reason for this lay in the fact that, while in times of relative peace during human history men create history unconsciously, i.e., they do not think about the course of their everyday lives but simply act in accordance with traditions that have stood the test of time, during an age of revolutions, when the question of which new mode of action should be adopted is the order of the day, as is the question about the new style of life that will take shape, then men begin to call into question and discuss things which previously had been seen as familiar and indisputable. It becomes urgent to explain why men used to live in that particular way, and not any other and whether that way of life corresponded to man's true calling. It is obvious that the very formulation of such a question presupposes negation of what has gone before, for when everything is considered correct and proper, then such questions do not arise at all. An age of social revolutions thus constitutes a period of man's conscious participation in the life of society, when people are deliberately working to reshape their society. As a result of this, during every revolution—while it is being prepared for and carried out—ideologists appear on the scene who

reject the previous human ideal and formulate a new one. This was also the case at the time of the French Revolution: a small group of writers and philosophers laid the foundations for a mighty movement of ideas that came to be known as the Enlightenment and which exerted an enormous influence on the whole of Europe's cultural life from that time on. The prophet of this movement was Voltaire. Voltaire's historical achievement lay in the fact that "he opened the way for the party of an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the people, the party of the 'Enlighteners', 'philosophers', 'patriots', which came to fill the place formerly occupied by the avantgarde of this class, namely the parliamentary bourgeoisie which was hostile to the people and always ready to defend feudal practices, since that bourgeoisie, according to Voltaire, itself owned landed estates".[1] Voltaire became the figurehead for that new age, first of all because he was one of the first to direct the sharp edge of his talent against the domination of the Church and the ignorant arbitrary rule of those governing his country. His appeal directed against the Church: "Trample down abuses!" was for many years a general demand. To the defense of innocent men condemned by the Church, such as Jean Calas and many others, Voltaire devoted a great deal of energy, personally attending their trials which served to reveal the religious fanaticism and cruelty of contemporary churchmen. Voltaire, however, did

[1] M. Lifshits, "The Great French Enlightener", *Novy mir*, Moscow, No. 6, 1953, p. 241 (in Russian).

not come out against religion in general but only against its outward manifestation in his time, against the Catholic Church, and herein lay the limitations of his philosophical position. In Voltaire's opinion God was essential to Man and if he had not existed he would have had to be invented. Voltaire fought against all kinds of ignorance, against fanaticism and he was in favour of religious tolerance, or, to use Kant's words, he was in favour of religion "within the limits of pure reason". In his criticism of religion Voltaire emerges as a brilliant and witty denouncer of obscurantism. His speeches against the Church were of tremendous significance, since, thanks to his great talent, he succeeded in subjecting all the vices of religious fanaticism to merciless and savage ridicule.

Another thrust of Voltaire's political activity was his campaign for a more enlightened monarchy and against serfdom and feudal privileges. Famous to this day are his numerous statements in both letters and speeches in defence of the peasants' interests, in particular his *Requête à tous les magistrats du royaume* (Request to All the Magistrates of the Realm). In this work he describes the oppression to which the peasants were subjected and calls for an alleviation of their lot. Voltaire was the first writer to put before the French Enlighteners a programme for ideological struggle against rampant absolutism.

Hopes for an enlightened monarchy derived from the theory of a social contract, in accordance with which all men are united in society as a result of mutual agreement and elect an

individual with whom responsibility rests for ensuring that all the rules within the contract are observed, and this individual is the King. If we start out from this interpretation of the social condition, then it has to be acknowledged that the more enlightened the Monarch the more the social order will be in accordance with the true calling of Man. Most of the Enlighteners adhered to these views and saw their task to lie in "enlightening" not just the Monarch, but also the whole people, with regard to the "true" principles underlying human society. At that time these hopes seemed feasible and it is not surprising, since it was only Karl Marx, a hundred years later, who succeeded in finding a different explanation for the fact of man's social condition, in the light of which the bringing together of men into a society is recognised to be the result of their joint labour and not the product of any preliminary, deliberately devised contract. For the 18th century, however, the concepts put forward by the thinkers of the Enlightenment were the only possible ones. In this campaign as well Voltaire was one of the most powerful propagandists.

Voltaire paved the way for the subsequent development of philosophical thought in France. It is in his fascinating and subtle philosophical tales that the paradoxes inherent in the Enlightenment first come to light. This is particularly clear in such works as *Zadig ou la Destinée* (Zadig, or Fate) and in his *Candide*. In these books he seeks to reveal the essence of history, to explain its

laws and to identify the causes of the existence of Evil. In many of his works Voltaire disputes Leibniz's assertion that all that happens to man is for the best and that a good purpose always exists even though it may not be obvious. Therefore, Leibniz held, in the final analysis, Evil is directed towards Good and consequently has no absolute meaning.

Voltaire presents the problem in such a way as to show that acceptance of absolute Good, the fact that all is for the best, also has another side to it—acceptance that absolute Evil is inevitable and absolute. The paradoxical nature of all that exists then manifests itself in the fact that Evil is indispensable for Good as such. As soon as we accept, however, that Good exists, then all at once it emerges that its cause is something opposed to it—namely Evil, and vice versa. This paradoxical quality was not raised by Leibniz: for him Evil had no independent significance and was eliminated in Good. Voltaire, for his part, viewed the situation differently: both Good and Evil are of equal importance and emerge as the results and causes of each other. This paradox Voltaire demonstrated in a conversation between Zadig and the angel Jesrad:

" 'Yet what would happen,' said Zadig, 'if there was only Good and no Evil?' 'Then,' replied Jesrad, 'this world would be a different world, and the sequence of events in it would constitute a different order, a wise order, and that different order, which would be perfect, can only be possible in the eternal domain of the Supreme Being, whom

Evil durst not approach.'"[1]

In *Candide*, a merciless parody of Leibniz' theory (while Zadig can rather be regarded as a light-hearted gibe), Voltaire tries to examine whether a world without Evil is possible, i.e., a world without paradoxes, but ultimately he is obliged to accept that it is impossible to come to grips with this problem. According to Voltaire, man is not able to comprehend the laws underlying the fundamental order of the world, his mind is powerless to attain the ultimate truth. Therefore man should resist from arguing and "cultivate his garden". Yet the problem is not resolved, merely shelved. Voltaire maintains that man should act, rather than reason, but if he does not reason, then he will not know how to act. The meaning underlying the ordering of the world remains shrouded in mystery.

Discussions about Good and Evil, the meaning of human life and man's vocation were going on at that time, not merely between philosophers (although they led the way): the whole of France, now facing the task of creating a new social order, was seeking to resolve these questions and going about this with heated arguments. The spirit traditionally associated with the nobility and the monarchy was now only to be found in the families of a very small number of Parliamentarians: the new generation of members was completely under the spell of the new ideas. They were making fun of former fash-

[1] Voltaire, "Zadig", *Collection des chefs d'œuvre*, Librairie Ferreyrol, Paris, 1913, pp. 137-138.

ions, the feudal pride of their forefathers and their serious approach to etiquette: the pompous nature of the old doctrines was no longer attractive to men inclined to oppose the old order, who instead were more attracted to the freedom-loving philosophy of Voltaire. While inequality still persisted with regard to the allocation of posts, the principle of equality was coming to gain the upper hand when it came to public opinion. In many cases acclaim as a writer was coming to mean more than aristocratic titles.

State institutions were still of the monarchist variety, yet the mood inside them was becoming Republican. This mood was beginning to penetrate even as far as the households of the most noble grandees, and pride of place in society was accorded not to nobles but to clever and educated men like Voltaire, the son of a notary, Diderot, the son of a cutler, D'Alembert, the foster-child of a glazier, and Rousseau, the son of a watchmaker. Not only were these men admitted to high society, but they were invited everywhere, lionised and imitated by countless people. The whole of France began to recognise them as the most deserving of men, not most noble, but those who were the most intelligent and cultivated. Intelligence and education were becoming criteria of human virtue. This pointed to the fact that France stood on the threshold of great changes, that a new era was about to dawn—an era of Reason, bourgeois reason. To use Engels' words, everything was bound to demonstrate its right to existence in face of Reason—or

perish. Engels wrote: "We saw ... how the French philosophers of the eighteenth century, the forerunners of the Revolution, appealed to reason as the sole judge of all that is. A rational government, rational society were to be founded; everything that ran counter to eternal reason was to be remorselessly done away with. We saw also that this eternal reason was in reality nothing but the idealized understanding of the eighteenth century citizen, just then evolving into the bourgeois. The French Revolution had realized this rational society and government.

"But, the new order of things, rational enough as compared with earlier conditions, turned out to be by no means absolutely rational. The state based upon reason completely collapsed. Rousseau's *Contrat Social* had found its realization in the Reign of Terror, from which the bourgeoisie, who had lost confidence in their own potential capacity, had taken refuge first in the corruption of the Directorate, and, finally, under the wing of Napoleonic despotism. The promised eternal peace was turned into an endless war of conquest."[1]

Yet this finale still lay a long way ahead; in the 1730s the Kingdom of Reason seemed to be that "promised land". It did not yet exist and needed to be achieved, and when all was said and done the bourgeois ideal of human society represented a step forward in comparison with the feudal one. The *Encyclopédie*, of which Denis Diderot was the

[1] F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p. 303.

principal director, played a crucial part in the formation of these new ideas.

Diderot's wish to make specifically the *Encyclopédie* the political platform of the nation was dictated to a certain extent by the love of the French for dictionaries as such, a love which, according to Sainte-Beuve, had almost become a passion. As mentioned earlier, from the early eighteenth century onwards books were very important in France and contributed enormously to the spread of revolutionary ideas. Dictionaries published by a variety of people and parties were the subject of special attention. Pierre Bayle brought out in 1694 his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Historical and Critical Dictionary) and in Diderot's own time the Jesuits published the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* to name but two. As the specialist in the French book trade, Dubosc, commented, numerous dictionaries were at that time to find regular and indefatigable purchasers, despite the sometimes high prices. It is probable that to some extent this determined the nature of the publication that Diderot planned for the Enlightenment of his contemporaries. An encyclopaedia was in his opinion the most acceptable vehicle for his writings, for the simple reason that within it it would be possible, from one standpoint and within the framework of a single *Weltanschauung*, to provide answers to the numerous questions which were worrying the members of those strata of society already spellbound by revolutionary and oppositionist sentiments. It is no easy matter to assemble all available knowledge, yet linking this knowl-

edge together and directing it towards a common goal, a common interpretation of what new social relations should be like, that was the task which the editors of the *Encyclopédie* set themselves. The fact that the *Encyclopédie* did in fact accomplish its revolutionary goal is borne out by the resolution passed by the Conseil d'Etat in 1758, in which the accusation directed against the *Encyclopédie* nevertheless includes acknowledgement of the influence of its ideas on the intellectual life of France: "It is with great regret that we are compelled to say this; there is no denying that this is a project conceived for a particular purpose, that a society has been formed in order to give support to materialism, to destroy religion, to inspire independence and to promote the corruption of men's morals."[1]

As early as 1758, i.e. seven years after the first volume saw the light of day, the authors of the *Encyclopédie* were accused of rejecting the idea of divine kingship and that when they explained the role of the king they pointed either to violence or to the social contract. They were also accused of considering that Reason should of necessity play a part in various religious ceremonies and rituals, and of demanding freedom of conscience, religious tolerance and so on. In the 1770s these philosophers were reproached with "setting themselves up as the mentors of the human race. 'Freedom of thought' is their rallying call and this call has made itself heard from one end of the world to the

[1] F. Rocquain, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

other. On the one hand they have tried to undermine the throne and on the other they have tried to overturn altars. Their object has been to make men's minds adopt a new view of civil and religious institutions, and they have effected a revolution, as it were."[1]

The contributors to the *Encyclopédie* did indeed effect a revolution in human minds and thus paved the way for political revolution. It was precisely in their *milieu* that new views of the essence of Man, of his rights and duties and of the "true" social order took shape, among other things. The publication of numerous volumes of the *Encyclopédie* gave rise to a situation in which, to use Voltaire's phrase, to spite all the strict restrictions to which the *Encyclopédie* was subjected, all Frenchmen and even all Europeans became advocates of the *Encyclopédie*.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that all those who took part in this colossal task, that went on for over twenty years, achieved a real feat. And the first champion of the *Encyclopédie*, its tireless organizer and, in the true sense of the word, spiritual leader, was Denis Diderot.

A few words relating to the story of how the *Encyclopédie* came into being will show how great Diderot's achievement was.

What provided the initial stimulus for its publication was the proposition put forward in 1742 by two publishers—Mills from England and Sellius from Germany—to the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 278.

French book-dealer Le Breton to bring out a new edition of Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, that had been brought out in England a few years previously. A request for his participation in the project was addressed to Diderot, who was most anxious to bring together all knowledge so far attained in one work aimed at furthering the achievement of human happiness, so that Chambers' dictionary merely provided him with a facade as it were. Diderot devoted an enormous amount of time to selecting contributors and drawing up *Le Prospectus de l'Encyclopédie*. His closest friend at this time was to become the eminent mathematician d'Alembert who shared his opinions and principles. Not long afterwards Voltaire was to compare Diderot and d'Alembert with Hercules and Atlas, who supported the terrestrial globe on his shoulders. According to Voltaire once again, army officers, seamen, judges, doctors of medicine, writers, scientists and even progressive priests joined forces for this enterprise, so useful and at the same time so difficult, with no thought for personal gain and not even so as to seek fame—since after all many of those concerned were at pains to conceal their identity. Among those who contributed to the *Encyclopédie* were such famous names as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Holbach, Helvétius, Turgot, Quesnay, Rousseau, Buffon, Condorcet and Marmontel. The "Prospectus..." written by Diderot and d'Alembert, sheds light on the purposes behind the publication: to collect together all human knowledge in the

sphere of science and art. In this connection Diderot refers to Francis Bacon as the thinker from whom he borrowed the idea. In addition to this Diderot was attempting, unlike anyone else before him, to chart systematically the emergence and development of handicrafts, to which end he visited many workshops and made a study of the production of a variety of articles (such as cloth, paper and so on) and learnt how to make them himself.

The history of the *Encyclopédie* is virtually Diderot's life story: the idea for its publication first came to him in 1745, the first volume was published in 1751 when he was thirty-eight, the whole project—complete with etchings and drawings—was completed in 1772 (the last volumes of text appeared in 1765) and Diderot was to die in 1784, at the age of seventy-one.

After the publication of the second volume the *Encyclopédie* was banned. The reason for this was the defence of a thesis in the Sorbonne by l'abbé de Prades, one of Diderot's friends and the possible author of a number of articles on questions of theology. De Prades was publicly accused of unbelief, his thesis was rejected and this gave the Jesuits a pretext for attacking the *Encyclopédie*. The government placed a ban on those volumes already published and entrusted the publication of all further volumes to the Jesuits. However, the latter were unequal to this task, and as a result Diderot and d'Alembert took up their work again unofficially. A real-life tragedy was to follow upon

the appearance of Volume VII, in which d'Alembert's entry *Geneva* appeared. The fact of the matter was that in that entry he attempted to advocate religious tolerance in place of religious fanaticism, which in his view reigned in the religious life of Geneva. A public scandal ensued, in which Rousseau, one of Diderot's close friends, was involved. Differences had come to light previously between Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists on the subject of religion and, after d'Alembert's article appeared, Rousseau declared that he wanted to have nothing more to do with him. This quarrel between once like-minded collaborators foreshadowed the political and philosophical disagreements which were to come to light later during the revolution.

In 1758 Helvétius' book *De l'Esprit* (Essays on the Mind) was published and called forth bitter attacks from various prominent members of contemporary French society. In 1759 the French Parliament decreed that it was to be burnt. At the same time work was brought to a standstill on the *Encyclopédie* since attention was soon drawn to many features common to both the ideas on its pages and those found in Helvétius' book. A little earlier (1757) the King had issued a stern declaration that all those found guilty of compiling themselves, or commissioning the compilation or printing of works aimed either at attacking religion or the monarchy or seaking to undermine peace and order in the land, would be subject to the death penalty. In the 1750s Jean Calas and la Barr, both accused of atheism, were indeed execut-

ed, and from this it emerges all too clearly how dangerous it was at that time to publish banned books. For Diderot, however, the cruellest blow in this situation was that dealt him by d'Alembert, who found himself unable to endure any longer the constant harrassment and worry, the risks and tensions involved in the work and eventually resigned his editorship. In vain Diderot tried to persuade him to continue: in the end d'Alembert agreed merely to continue his supervision of the mathematical sections of the *Encyclopédie*. Voltaire suggested to Diderot that he should follow d'Alembert's example or at least transfer the publication of the *Encyclopédie* to one of the "enlightened" monarchies—Russia or Prussia—but Diderot refused. Diderot, who considered that he was working for France, could not leave the country, not only because he had fifty well-trained compositors working for the *Encyclopédie*, but also because he would be leaving behind his friends, contact with whom was indispensable if he was to be able to think and write.

In 1759 work began in secret on further volumes of the *Encyclopédie*, for which all the responsibility was to lie on Diderot's shoulders for a full seven years. In 1765 the last ten volumes of the printed text were brought out simultaneously, but the engravings and drawings to accompany them were published a few years later—in 1772. After he had completed the work, a still crueller blow was in store for Diderot: it came to light that the last volumes had been "corrected" just before printing by the cautious

Le Breton and had thus been published in mutilated form. According to Diderot's friend Friedrich Melchior von Grimm, Diderot wept from distress and despair upon finding that entries which he himself had corrected and reworked had been amended beyond recognition.

Yet despite all these setbacks, this Herculean task, involving countless worries, privations, fears and requiring endless ingenuity, was finally completed. In the preface to the eighth volume, which Diderot was to publish alone without d'Alembert, he wrote: "For the last twenty years on end we have only known rare moments of rest. After days consumed by thankless labour, how many nights have been passed in anticipation of the disasters which malice sought to bring upon us! How many times have we risen from our beds uncertain as to whether, if succumbing to slanderous attacks, we might be tearing ourselves away from our families and friends, our fellow citizens, if compelled to seek the peace we need and the patronage held out to us beneath a foreign sky! Yet our country was dear to us and we have always hoped that prejudice would give way to justice.... O dear compatriots and contemporaries, however sternly you may judge this work, remember that it was undertaken, pursued and completed by a small number of men isolated and harrassed for their views, presented to the world in the most hateful, slanderous and outrageous light in the cruellest manner and possessed of no other encouragement than their love of Good, no other sup-

port than an occasional approving voice, no other succour than that which they gleaned from the confidence of three or four men of commerce!"[1]

Diderot himself, according to one of his biographers, R. I. Sementkovsky, was the author of 1,259 entries, which in their turn reveal that while as far as d'Alembert was concerned the *Encyclopédie* served to bring together mathematical knowledge, for Diderot, on the other hand, it was first and foremost a political platform. Many "words" defined in it provided him quite simply with an opportunity to express his political opinions. The entry "Morals", for example, consists of a critique of absolute, unenlightened monarchy, and the same can be said of the entry "Property". This does not give the reader grounds for considering that Diderot's entries are popular rather than academic: it is simply that Diderot was more of a philosopher and social thinker than a representative of the exact sciences. This point will be developed in more detail in a subsequent chapter.

Diderot should be given the credit he deserves not merely for having the *Encyclopédie*, a highly original printed work, published at all, but also for instituting the *Republic of Scholars*, whose efforts and labours bore fruit in the shape of the *Encyclopédie*. The society of cultured and highly educated men which had at one time existed in Florence at the court of Lorenzo the Magnificent and from which came such great men as Michelangelo,

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 13, Garnier Frères, Paris, 1876, pp. 172-173.

Leonardo da Vinci and Pico della Mirandola now took shape again in eighteenth-century France thanks to Diderot. It consisted of men, who, to use Marx' words, were united in universal labour. Marx held that "a distinction should be made between universal labour and co-operative labour. Both kinds play their role in the process of production, both flow out into the other, but both are also differentiated. Universal labour is all scientific labour, all discovery and all invention. This labour depends partly on the co-operation of the living, and partly on the utilization of the labours of those who have gone before. Co-operative labour, on the other hand, is the direct co-operation of individuals."[1] Thus, it follows that as the result of joint labour there emerges a jointly created product, whose creator is not each individual as such, who plays a definite but nevertheless partial role in manufacturing it, but rather the co-operation of individuals—the so-called co-operative workers; while in universal labour each participant creates a whole product, but the prerequisite for co-operative labour is argument and discussion with other individuals capable of creative activity.

The development of the philosophy between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe took shape primarily in the course of correspondence and rare direct encounters between individual thinkers. Thanks to the *Encyclopédie* a new type of communication began to grow up in eighteenth-century

[1] K. Marx, F. Engels, *Capital*, Vol. III, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1974, p. 104.

France, a different form of universal labour: it was a spontaneous, direct and literally daily form of communication, and it was in arguments and dialogues that the ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers took shape. Holbach and Helvétius, Rousseau and Diderot, Condorcet and Condillac and many others were arguing and polemicising with each other as they created their writings. Each one made his contribution to the elaboration of a joint programme, constantly amending his own point of view under the influence of all the others. The *Encyclopédie* might well be considered a "co-operative thinker" or a "co-operative philosopher". It could be said that the circle of those grouped round the *Encyclopédie* was the bud from which developed the close ties between scholars that nowadays is termed the "micro-group". Gradually the views of those participating in this circle came to predominate within the intellectual life of Europe as a whole.

The scholars associated with the *Encyclopédie* were also referred to as Enlighteners since they had set themselves the task of bringing education to the people and of "enlightening" the monarchs of the time, as to what a "truly" humane society meant. What was really at stake was the elaboration of an anti-feudal ideal of Man, and the propagation of such knowledge. This was the Enlighteners' central task, because for over two hundred years the idea of Man as a creature with a two-fold nature—physical man full of sin, on the one hand, and spiritual man, the recipient of divine grace, on the other—had

held sway throughout feudal Europe and had been supported by the Church. The Church had been teaching man to live on earth in such a way that they might merit rewards in the next world, and this teaching applied to the way in which the individual behaved towards his fellow men. Although he might start out from the principle that "all men are brothers", at the same time he was not entitled to forget the strict social heirarchy: for instance, he who was born to be a noble, received from God not merely "blue blood" but also other distinctions including the privilege to rule, and it was a sin to resist what was pre-ordained by God.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment, in accordance with the demands of the new age, substituted for this view a view of Man as a natural creature and above all a physical one, whose emotions and reason they declared to be the products of his physical organization. Although in physical respects all individuals are distinct one from another, these differences can be regarded as unimportant since men are brought together by the fact that they are all creatures of Nature. This makes them all equal and hence all social privileges should be abolished. They had existed on account of an erroneous understanding of the essence of Man. This meant that the next task was to help men understand the truth and rebuild society in accordance with human nature. It was precisely this concept of Man and human relations that was considered reasonable. In other words, that which was rooted in Nature and which was in ac-

cordance with it, was reasonable. In fact, the reasonable and the natural came to be seen as synonymous. This description of the Enlightenment as "the age of the final triumph of Reason and at the same time that of Man determined by Nature"[1] served to express a very important aspect of the thinking of that age: while from a negative angle Reason is seen as the antithesis of all prior existence (above all that of the social variety), in a positive sense what is reasonable coincides with that which is natural. All desires and needs of Man are reasonable since they are determined by his natural properties: as in the case of human life, the life of all natural creatures, including the existence of inorganic objects can be justified through reference to natural laws. In other words, reasonable existence must be in accordance with the natural essence of an object or phenomenon. This was demonstrated with adequate clarity by Holbach, for whom what was reasonable was that which was natural and "in conformity with the essence of things or with the laws prescribed by Nature for all beings that she doth encompass, according to the different positions these beings occupy".[2] At first glance the concept of man adhered to by the thinkers of the Enlightenment may seem perfectly correct. Indeed, is not man in truth a natural being, in the sense that

[1] H. Friedrich and F. Schalk, Eds., *Europäische Aufklärung*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, Munich, 1967, p. 23.

[2] Paul-Henri Holbach, *Système de la Nature, ou des Loix du Monde Physique et du Monde Moral*, London, 1973, p. 10.

he possesses a body and physiological needs that are determined by his physical organization? Is it not also true that his non-physical needs stem from his physical nature, in particular from the structure of his brain? Would it not be more reasonable in view of this to satisfy all Man's needs, rather than to disavow them as the Church calls upon us to do? All this might appear to be right, and yet...

What should be done in those cases when men perpetrate crimes and cause harm to other men? Are such acts determined by Man's nature? Here there emerges the possibility of two different solutions, of two answers which in a certain respect are opposed to each other. If everything in Man is determined by Nature, including his negative inclinations, then probably it is futile to stand in their way for Nature will "win out" anyway: enlightenment in that case is useless, because it is not in a position to triumph over Nature. Yet another answer is also possible, according to which what is natural needs to be interpreted in a special light: while in the first case everything in Nature was considered reasonable, in the second only that which is reasonable is considered natural, which then means that Man's negative inclinations and desires can be recognized as unnatural. In the second case enlightenment can then help men to do away with evil.

Careful attention paid to these differing answers makes it easier to single out the contradictory essence of the very foundation of the views propagated by the thinkers of

the Enlightenment, of their concept of natural man. Indeed, on the one hand what is natural is seen as the foundation of existence and only that which is in accordance with Nature is declared to be correct and reasonable. Later, however, it emerges that it is necessary to define what "natural" means: whereas previously the foundation of what was natural was to be found in Nature itself, the natural now reveals its significance differently—through Reason. Now the curtain obscuring Man's "second", i.e. social nature, begins to rise. Thus the concept of the natural emerges on two opposed planes: the nature of man is a matter for the individual, as a result of which he would appear to be entitled to satisfy absolutely all his desires, since they all stem "from Nature" and therefore are natural and reasonable; however, Man does not live alone, he is always in society, which came into being, according to the thinkers of the Enlightenment, as a result of men's mutual agreement, and for that reason he cannot behave towards others in a way different from that in which he would like them to behave towards him. Therefore, according to the thinkers of the Enlightenment, only those desires can be viewed as reasonable which coincide with the desires of others: a correspondence between what is natural for the individual and what is natural for society is declared to be what is reasonable. In this way "natural egoism" is replaced by "reasonable egoism".

The views of these thinkers are constantly fluctuating between these two criteria of what

is "natural"—what is natural for the individual (which might be termed the "absolute in naturalness") and what is natural for society (which even in its essence is artificial, a "second" Nature, i.e. not Nature in the true sense of the word, since its principles are bestowed on Man not by the fact of his birth, like those of his essential nature, but emerge on the basis of a reasonable contract). Herein lies the contradiction inherent in the conception found in the writings of these thinkers, the development of which inevitably was sooner or later to lead to a reinterpretation of the concept of Man. But this reinterpretation was only to take place some hundred years later, when Marx demonstrated that Nature itself, after the appearance of Man, turns into an object of Man's transforming activity, and that Man is never simply a natural being, but is always a social being.

Behind this concept of the "natural man" put forward by the thinkers of the Enlightenment there was bourgeois mentality, and the demand for men to be equal was in actual fact an assertion of a formal right and a formal justice. In other words, the image of "natural men" reflected at that time an anti-feudal ideal, yet there is no doubt that this interpretation represented a step forward in the history of intellectual progress. It was from this starting point that the thinkers of the Enlightenment waged their struggle against the Church and the Monarchy. Yet even at this early stage the contradictory nature of the bourgeois ideal of Man began to surface, even though initially, particularly sharp vision

was required for as yet unclear and embryonic forms of these contradictions to be appreciated. One of the few scholars who succeeded in doing this and who realized that the specific nature of contemporary thought of that particular period lay precisely in this contradiction was Denis Diderot. He can be considered as one of those who succeeded in analysing his own ideas. He was, as it were, the mirror in which were reflected the contradictions inherent in the thought processes of the men of learning grouped round the *Encyclopédie*. While concentrating his attention on those contradictions, he proved able to define the limitations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century mechanistic thinking. An attempt will be made to demonstrate this in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND PARADOXES IN THE WORK OF DENIS DIDEROT

1. Diderot Comes into His Own

The process of Diderot's emergence as an original thinker was more or less complete by the middle of the 1740s, i.e. by the time when his plan for the *Encyclopédie* had become his main preoccupation. Prior to this for a period of almost ten years he had devoted himself to intensive independent study of philosophy, literature, history and quests for new paths in scientific research.

Denis Diderot was born on October 5, 1713 in the town of Langres, the son of a relatively prosperous master cutler. His father had striven to give his two sons a good education and the only way in the France of that period to acquire an education was to attend Jesuit colleges and schools. For this reason Denis and his younger brother Didier began at the age of 8-9 to attend just such a college in their home town, where their studies were concerned mainly with classical languages, history, the art of oratory and literature.

It was probably under the influence of his mentors at that college, who tried to prepare Diderot for a career in the Church, that at the age of 12 he decided to leave for Paris,

in order to complete his education in that city. His father helped him to carry out that plan: he travelled with his son and helped him enroll in the Collège d'Harcourt, where Diderot continued his pursuit of languages and began to study mathematics, which initially had not aroused his enthusiasm in the least. It is clear that the years Diderot spent at the Collège served to strengthen his intention to renounce the idea of a career in the Church, because after graduating from the Collège, he started work, on his father's advice, as assistant to the Public Prosecutor Clément de Ris, who had also come from Langres, but under whom Diderot was only to continue to work for two years. Jurisprudence, however, did not attract him: in his free time Diderot continued to study languages, including English by this time, and mathematics. Finally he renounced the idea of working in any of the professions and instead began to devote himself to scholarship. It would be wrong to affirm that this decision was in keeping with his father's wishes. For perfectly understandable reasons Diderot's father wanted to see his son opt for a "definite career": however he remained broad-minded and did not force his son to join any branch of government service, insisting merely that Denis opt for one particular occupation. Yet Diderot was quite unable to comply with his wishes: he did not yet feel able to "commit himself" and asked his father for further time for reflection. In Diderot's opinion it would be preferable to lead a free life relying only on humble means, a life shaped by one's

own interests and not by external rules, rather then the tedious life of a prosperous but narrow-minded civil servant. Ten years of Diderot's life—from 1733 to 1744—were devoted to intensive searching for his true path in life. While earning his living by giving occasional lessons (since his father had refused to help him any more), Diderot was devoting all his time to the study of philosophy, mathematics, history, literature and languages: it was during this period that his "encyclopaedic mind" was being nurtured, the mind that would later be organizing the *Encyclopédie*. It was during these years that he came across the ideas of the English moral philosopher Lord Shaftesbury, whose book *Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit*, which he translated in 1745, was to have a significant influence on the conception of man which was taking shape in Diderot's mind.

During those years Diderot was a close friend of Rousseau, Condillac and other men who were later to become famous writers and philosophers. They spent long hours in conversation and scholarly argument. There are grounds for believing that the main ideas expressed in Rousseau's work *Discours sur les Arts et Sciences* for which he was awarded the prize of the Dijon Academy, had been suggested to him by Diderot. What is certain at least is that the frequent meetings and conversations between these two great men exerted a considerable influence on each of them.

In 1746 Diderot brought out his first original work: *Pensées philosophiques* (Philosoph-

ical Thoughts) which Parliament condemned to the flames. Diderot had foreseen this when he had written in that same work: "If they (the men of God) consider but once that this writing contains something contrary to their ideas, I shall expect all the calumny which they have already spread abroad concerning hundreds of men more worthy than I am. If I am called a deist and criminal I shall have been punished lightly. It is a long time ago now that they condemned Descartes, Montaigne, Locke and Bayle and I hope that they will be condemning many others."[1]

Indeed the Jesuits were unable to accept Diderot's writings, first and foremost because in them he championed religious tolerance and recognized the equal merit of all religions before the face of that natural religion by which Diderot meant reasonable demonstration of the existence of a reasonable God and in which he incorporated the right to doubt God's existence. In those times it was dangerous to write about the acceptability of doubt at all.

Taken all in all, that first independent writing of Diderot's could have been called "In Praise of Reason", since the main idea in it, running through the whole work consisted in the idea that the rights of Reason should be asserted everywhere, including the domain of religion.

Although in this work Diderot still writes as a deist, that is he still accords God the

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 1, p. 257.

right of the first impetus behind creation, which means that the world is presented as a mechanism that operates subsequently in accordance with its own laws, the arguments of the atheist that he presents to the reader are in essence testimony to the fact that he himself was turning towards atheism, was stepping onto the path which would later lead to a complete rejection of religious faith: "I tell you that there is no God at all: that the Creation is a fanciful dream ... that if the marvels which shine in the physical world, bear the stamp of some kind of intelligence, the disorder which reigns in the moral order of things reduces to nothing any kind of Providence... Even if it had been demonstrated, which is not the case, that all evil is the source of some good, that it was in the name of Good that Britannicus, the finest among Princes, perished, and that a Nero, the most evil of men, should have reigned, how might one prove that it would have been impossible to achieve the same end without resorting to the same means? Permitting vices in order to enhance the lustre of virtues, is, to be sure, a frivolous gain at the price of such a dire hardship."[1]

As can be seen from this extract Diderot was focussing his attention on those same paradoxes upon which Voltaire had remarked and which brought to light the contradictions in religion. Even at this early stage a special feature of Diderot's thinking comes to light, namely his ability to develop the arguments of his interlocutor (and even those

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 203-204.

of his opponents) in such detail that it appears he has gone over to their side. However, at the same time he develops in similar detail the other (often the opposite) point of view. This feature of his writing was somewhat later to develop as ideas expressed in dialogue or "paradoxes".

In his *Pensées philosophiques*, Diderot argues from a deist position, although scepticism is beginning to play an important role in his outlook. Here, however, Diderot argues as follows: the deist asserts that God exists, that the soul is immortal, and all that goes with this; the sceptic has no firm opinion on these issues, while the atheist denies them. It would seem, he concludes, that the sceptic has greater reason to lead a virtuous life than the atheist, and less than the deist. For, according to Diderot, without fear of the law and without knowledge of the advantage which the practice of virtue will bring, the integrity of the atheist would be deprived of a basis, and the integrity of the sceptic would be based on "playing safe".

At the same time, however, Diderot is inclined to believe that "scepticism is ... the first step towards the truth", and that something which is never subject to doubt cannot be considered proven. The time of miracles, revelations and exceptional signs has passed, he writes, and "if the whole of Paris were to assure me that in Passy a dead man had risen to life, I would not believe it".[1] "A single demonstration of evidence influences me more than fifty facts. As I have extreme confidence

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 1, p. 146.

in my power of reasoning my faith does not depend on the whims of the first poseur whom I happen to come across."[1] If religion is genuine, its genuineness should be proved incontrovertibly—such is the conclusion Diderot arrived at by 1746.

Thus, the main idea in this work by Diderot is that religion should be grounded in reason.

In Diderot's next works we already find a different concept, namely that reason and faith are incompatible. More than once he comments half-humorously, half-seriously, that God, if He exists, will surely not punish a man for disbelief if his reason does not accord with that belief, as reason has, no doubt, been given to men so that they might make use of it. In his *Addition aux Pensées philosophiques* (Supplement to Philosophical Thoughts) published anonymously in Holland much later, in 1770), Diderot expresses the idea that to posit correspondence between human reason and eternal, divine reason, and at the same time believe that God requires people to abandon reason is to assert that God both wants and does not want something simultaneously. "If God, from whom we have received reason, requires that we abandon it, this means he is a player of tricks who immediately removes what he has given.... In order to eliminate this difficulty it must be admitted that belief is a chimerical principle which does not exist in nature."[2]

Diderot goes on to comment on a strange contradiction within religion. God the Father

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 149.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

finds men worthy of eternal damnation; God the Son finds them worthy of infinite compassion; the Holy Spirit remains neutral. How is this confusion in the Catholic faith to be reconciled with the unity of divine will, asks Diderot. The problem, in his opinion, lies not merely in the illogicality of certain Catholic explanations, but in profound logical contradictions characteristic of the Christian creed. They cannot be removed because faith contradicts reason.

Summarising his reflections on this question, Diderot writes: "If reason is a gift from heaven, and the same can be said of faith, then heaven has sent us two gifts which are incompatible with each other."[1]

Diderot's *La promenade du sceptique ou les Allées (Promenade of a Sceptic, or the Garden-Walks*—1747) is devoted to a critique of Christianity and defence of religious tolerance. Here Diderot contrasts wise and tolerant men strolling down a garden path lined with chestnut trees and reflecting upon Nature with the madmen and fanatics whom we meet in the path of thorns. Difference of opinion among the first does not disrupt friendly conversations nor impede the display of virtue; opponents are attacked without hatred, and although some of them are defeated in arguments, there is no vainglory in the celebration of victory. Here no one oppresses another, not coerces him in his opinions, views and tastes; here one can see how the follower of Pirrhon embraces the sceptic, how the scep-

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

tic rejoices at the successes of the atheist, how the atheist donates money to the deist, and the deist offers his services to the follower of Spinoza. In a word, all philosophical sects are to be found here in friendly unity, here there reigns harmony, love of truth, purity of heart and peace.

Tolerance is the only possible principle permitting co-existence among men: "Let the spirit of intolerance inspire the Mohammedans, let them uphold their religion with fire and sword—they are consistent. But when people who name themselves disciples of Him who brought to earth the law of love, good will and peace defend this law by force of arms, this is simply intolerable. Have they forgotten how strictly He reprimanded those of his disciples who, out of excess of zeal, asked Him to bring down fire from heaven onto those towns which they had not been able to win over because of their own fault? In brief: if the arguments of an independent mind are solid, then it is ridiculous to oppose them; and if they are unfounded, then it is ridiculous to fear them."[1]

We see that Diderot is continuing to posit reason as the sole judge in justifying the right of anything to exist. In the argument between the sage and the fanatic it is the sage who wins: he tells the fanatic that in his hands reason is a powerless weapon: constantly under the tutelage of various leaders, he is capable only of inspiring despair. And Diderot compares the fanatics to blind men who claim to have

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

knowledge of the light, although they have no concept of what light is. In contrast, the philosopher-sages are convinced that reason is a gift of God and sufficient to guide along the way, and that only rational laws should be honoured, and crime hated.

It this work Diderot clearly moves to an atheistic position: supporting the concept of the eternal existence of matter and motion, with the latter distributing material particles in a definite order, he is convinced that, after death, the soul ceases to exist, to conceptualise, to think, and that if this is so, then all guarantees of the existence of God also disappear.

In 1749 Diderot was imprisoned in the fortress at Vincennes, and although the immediate reason for his imprisonment were attacks on D'Argenson who was War Minister at that time, in his *Lettres sur les aveugles* (1749), clearly his critique of Christianity and defence of the rights of reason was not the least important factor in his imprisonment. Diderot argues that people turn to faith only when they cannot find an explanation for a given fact, or else in great grief. Thus, if some phenomenon exceeds human powers, we immediately say: it is an act of God; but would it not be better if we invested more reason into our arguments? "If nature presents us with a problem, some know that is difficult to unravel, then let us leave it as it is, and not attempt to resolve it by the hand of a being who then becomes for us an even more tangled knot than the first".[1]

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 308.

Happily, Diderot's imprisonment in the Vincennes fortress did not last long (perhaps this was thanks to the fact that Marquise du Chatelet, a friend of Voltaire, interceded on his behalf with the king), and he was soon able to resume work on the *Encyclopédie*.

By the beginning of the fifties, Diderot had already become a convinced atheist. He argued the scientific invalidity of religion in many of his books, including one of his most powerful atheistic works, *Conversation between the Abbé Barthèlemy and Diderot*. Here Diderot argues that not only do we know nothing about the existence of God, but also we cannot know anything: if God does exist, then He does so beyond the limits of human understanding, and therefore it is impossible to prove His existence.

Next Diderot focuses his attention on "miraculous" events such as the resurrection of Christ, immaculate conception, etc. In Diderot's opinion, all of them are transformed myths: "... your God in three people, your wicked angels who revolt against their Creator and try to dethrone Him, your Eve drawn out of Adam's side, your Virgin who receives the visit of a young man and a bird and who becomes pregnant, not by the young man, but by the bird; this virgin who bears a child and remains a virgin; this God who dies on the cross to appease God, then comes to life again and ascends into heaven (where, to heaven?), all that is mythology, my dear Abbé, it is paganism, it is worthy of Uranus, Saturn and the Titans... These are the same delirious adven-

tures".[1]

In essence, Diderot views belief in God as something like "lending money to God at a usurer's rate"[2]; if, in doing good deeds, a man counts on receiving a life in paradise in return, then this is nothing but usury. But, Diderot emphasizes, such hopes have no apparent foundation, for God almost never responds to people's requests and prayers, and suffering and death are the lot of people everywhere. "Never however ardent and vehement, however tearful, moving and irresistible your prayers may be, you will never draw from Him a single acknowledgement..."[3] Diderot asks the Abbé Barthélemy: "Do you recall the woman we saw one afternoon..., prostrate before the statue of the Virgin, praying, weeping, sobbing?" The woman was praying for her daughter, a child of fifteen. "She would have softened a heart of stone. But the stone Virgin did not wince, did not flinch... or at least we did not notice anything like that, I think".[4] And the woman's child died precisely while the mother was kneeling in the church.

Diderot states that God never takes into account mortals' wishes and prayers; He acts only of His own accord and in a way that is incomprehensible to the common man. Moreover, Diderot notes, the Bible describes instances that illustrate the cruelty of God, if He

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[1] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1937, p. 201.

[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 2, p. 508.

[3] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature*, pp. 192-93.

[4] Ibidem.

indeed exists: it commands the massacre "of these of our fellow-citizens who do not share our religious beliefs. 'Brother, son, daughter, mother, wife; do not discuss with them: kill them at once!' ...A charming plan and drawn up in the name of the Lord!", comments Diderot.[1]

In other works Diderot writes that religious intolerance has cost the lives of many people, that it causes people to maliciously denounce one another and propagates hatred. He describes the cruel treatment of Indians by Jesuit missionaries, the Jesuits' cruelty towards their families, and the cruelty of the clergy in general. One cannot serve the God of peace by committing murders, nor can religion be professed by fire and the sword; but zealous Christians have been doing exactly that: they shed other people's blood instead of sacrificing their own and seek their own benefit instead of doing good to other people.

In Diderot's opinion, religious intolerance, which gives rise to cruelty, murder and religious wars, is rooted in the very nature of the faith: a person who does not believe is the enemy of the believer and his God; the unbeliever is the greatest of criminals who must not be loved, helped or tolerated as a neighbour; the martyrs' blood is the seed of Christianity. Diderot discerns hatred everywhere: the Mohammedan hates the Christian, the Catholic hates the Protestant; there is no single place in the world where religious differences do not cause bloodshed. Diderot unmasks religious fanaticism and ignorance in

[1] Ibid., p. 204.

many of his writings, including the outstanding novel *La Religieuse* (Memoirs of a Nun) written in 1760 and published posthumously in 1796.

La Religieuse is one of Diderot's foremost works of fiction. It has been translated into many languages and has enjoyed great success in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Britain. The novel describes the tragedy of a young woman sent by her relatives to a convent. The nuns' fanaticism and cruelty cause her a lot of suffering. The heroine, poor Suzan, has taken the vows when almost unconscious, but when she decides she is no longer bound by them, the other nuns subject her to inhuman treatment: they take away her clothes and shoes, smash her plates and cups, and remove all her belongings from her cell, leaving only a plain mattress. For whole days she is left without food, and she is made to walk barefoot on a floor covered with shards of glass. To add insult to injury, the nuns stop talking to Suzan and do not let her do any work. Finally, they organize a funeral service for her. This is how Diderot's heroine describes it all: "When the service ended they put me in a coffin in the middle of the church. By my side they put some candles and a basin of holy water and covered me with a shroud. Then they recited a prayer for the repose of my soul and started to leave. Each one of the nuns sprinkled me with holy water and said, '*Requiescat in pace*' (May she rest in peace—T.D.). One has to speak the language of the convents to understand the threat that these words implied. Then two of the nuns removed

the shroud, put out the candles and left me lying there, soaking wet. I has no clothes to change into, and my dress dried on me. This trial was followed by another. The entire community assembled and declared that God's curse was upon me and that what I had done was an act of apostasy. The nuns were told that they would be disobeying their vows if they talked to me, helped me, came close to me or even touched things that I had used. They rigorously carried out these instructions."[1]

Diderot described the nuns' way of life, its cruelty and depravity, with a feeling of profound aversion. He portrayed life in the convents as full of hatred and malice, not of Christian love and compassion.

So atheists rather than believers turn out to be tolerant and, in the final analysis, moral people, concludes Diderot, and this view coincides with that expressed by Pierre Bayle, the great freethinker who believed in the existence of a society consisting exclusively of atheists. Diderot further developed this line of reasoning in a 1774 work describing a conversation between a philosopher and the wife of Marshal de**, in which he observes that one can quite easily be a moral person without believing in God and that one can derive pleasure from doing good deeds without expecting any reward in the hereafter. Diderot counters the argument put forward by the Duchess—who asserts that one can enter into usurial contracts with God as many times

[1] D. Diderot, *La Religieuse*, Gallimard, Paris, 1966, pp. 113-114.

as one pleases, for God will never be left without money, that the main objective consists in going to heaven, whether by cunning or by force, and that everything should be done to that end—by saying that he expects nothing from "the other world" and that, happily, one can be born able to derive pleasure from the good deeds themselves, while education can only strengthen this natural propensity to do good. In this context, Diderot makes the following distinction between philosophers and clergymen: while the very nature of the philosopher makes him a friend of reason and science, the nature of the priest makes him an enemy of reason and a patron of ignorance; hence, the former does good while the latter does evil.

A genuine moral code should be rooted in the laws of Nature, not in hypocritical religious morals. In *Supplement à Voyage de Bougainville* (Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage) Diderot writes that all previous history has been governed by three legislative codes—the code of Nature and the civil code, on the one hand, and the religious code, on the other,—between which there is no agreement and never can be. If society is to be arranged in a reasonable way, civil legislation must take the laws of Nature as its guideline, and the religious code thus becomes redundant. This is the only way to make morals reasonable and "natural". "If the laws are good, morals are good; if the laws are bad, morals are bad", concludes Diderot.[1] As long

[1] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 181.

as natural appetites are adulterated, he maintains, there will always be evil men and women. He notes that wherever people believe in the existence of God, there is always a cult, and wherever there is a cult, the natural order of moral duty is disrupted, which leads to a decline in morals.

Like other thinkers of the Enlightenment, Diderot stressed the need for moral education. He believed that, in addition to providing such education at schools, society should also instil high moral standards by using literature and the arts. Like other people who shared his views, Diderot believed that the spread of education would make people kinder and better, that as a result of it people would abandon religion and begin conscientiously working in order to transform the entire social organism with the help of an enlightened monarch. "Ignorance is the mother of all our errors... Ignorance and stupidity, which accompany injustice, erroneous views and superstition, are always painful," he stressed.[1]

In our view, this approach, while being fully in line with the spirit of the Enlightenment, suffers from limitations in that it reveals only the gnoseological and not the social roots of religion and therefore assumes that dissemination of knowledge will cause religion to disappear. To a certain extent, the philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach was guilty of the same mistake, as noted by Marx in his famous "Theses on Feuerbach": "Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-alien-

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 19, pp. 51-52.

ation, the duplication of the world into a religious, imaginary world and a real one. His work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis. He overlooks the fact that after completing his work, the chief thing still remains to be done. For the fact that the secular foundation detaches itself from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is really only to be explained by the self-cleavage and self-contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must itself, therefore, first be understood in its contradiction and then, by the removal of the contradiction, revolutionised in practice."[1]

Yet the limitations of the position on religion occupied by the philosophers of the Enlightenment were to be manifested only much later; in the mid-eighteenth century, their reliance on knowledge and education played a positive role, even though their awareness of the difficulties that would, in their view, be associated with the need to ensure a high level of education for everyone, made these philosophers, and Diderot among them, fear that atheism would always remain a doctrine espoused by only an insignificant number of people.

Still, criticism of the Church and religion by the philosophers of the Enlightenment played a major role in anti-religious propaganda, and Diderot's contribution to it was quite significant. His credo is expressed in

[1] Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", in K. Marx, F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 13.

Pensées sur l'interprétation de la Nature, written as early as 1754. In the final part of this work entitled, ironically, "Prière" (Prayer) Diderot addresses the following words to God: "I am not asking for anything in this world, for everything is determined by necessity if you do not exist, and by you if you do exist. I hope to be rewarded by you in the other world if it exists, even though all that I have been doing in this world I have been doing for my own sake. If I have embarked on a good path, I have done so without effort; if I have abandoned the road of evil, that was not because I was thinking of you. I could never prevent myself from loving truth and virtue and from hating lies and vice, even if I ... believed that you exist and that you do not like it. That is me—a part of eternal and necessary matter organized in a necessary way, or, maybe, your creature".[1]

Diderot continued his attacks on religion and the Church until the end of his life; his last words were, "once you no longer believe, you have made the first step towards philosophy".

The transition to an atheist position went hand in hand with the emergence of Diderot's own philosophical views, for during these particular years—1733-1750—Diderot was making a study of the works of Aristotle and Plato, Bacon and Locke, Descartes and Spinoza. Starting out with his *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient* (Letter on the Blind, for the Use of Those Who

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 2, p. 61.

See—1749) and up to and including his *Elements de physiologie* (Elements of Physiology—on which he was working from 1773 to 1780), Diderot was reflecting upon philosophical problems, as a result of which his own original mode of thought was gradually taking shape.

The mature writer was the Diderot of the *Pensées sur l'interprètation de la Nature* (Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature). *Principes philosophiques sur la matière et la mouvement* (Philosophical Principles of Matter and Movement), the trilogy devoted to the philosophical dialogues between d'Alembert and Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau* (Rameau's Nephew), *Jacques le fataliste et son maître, Salons, Elêments de Physiologie* and entries in the *Encyclopédie*—in short, those works which were written by Diderot between the fifties and the time of his death.

Right up until the very last days of his life Diderot was attacking tyrannical, arbitrary rule and ignorance, and calling for an enlightened and humane society for mankind. For this reason there are ample grounds for calling him one of the most illustrious representatives of the Age of the Enlightenment. All his works were devoted to the study of complex and contradictory situations pertaining to his times. With unsparing efforts he worked away at the *Encyclopédie*. Even his journey to Russia at the end of his life was aimed at practical implementation of the ideals of the Enlightenment.

The question as to the influence of the Enlightenment on the cultural life of Rus-

sia merits particular attention.

When Catherine II came to the throne in 1762, she corresponded with the thinkers of the Enlightenment, attempting as she did so to present herself as an enlightened reigning monarch. She had a particularly high opinion of Voltaire, but Diderot also won her respect. At a time when the contributors to the *Encyclopédie* were being subjected to persecution in France, Catherine II offered Diderot the opportunity to transfer the printing of the *Encyclopédie* to Russia, a mere matter of days after coming to the throne, promising him her help and support should he do so. Voltaire, who wrote in rapturous terms of the magnanimous "Semiramis of the North" spent a good deal of effort, trying to persuade Diderot to accept the offer. Diderot, however, turned it down, explaining that in Russia he would not have the literate compositors he needed. The real reason, as mentioned earlier, was that he could not imagine his life and work without the opportunity to communicate with his close friends and outside the intellectual climate of Paris.

Close personal ties soon developed between Catherine II and many of the scholars associated with the *Encyclopédie* soon after she came to power: for example, she invited d'Alembert to assume the role of tutor to the crown prince, but he did not take up the offer either. Then came an invitation to Diderot to visit Russia and, when already a far from young man, he undertook this journey in 1773.

He was accorded the warmest of receptions

by Catherine: he was granted the opportunity of conversing with her almost every day and these conversations consisted of discussions and arguments about all manner of philosophical and political questions. On the surface relations between them were extremely friendly, but soon Diderot began to feel that Catherine looked upon him as a freak of Nature, with whom it was interesting to talk, but whose advice it would be quite impossible to put into practice. Diderot's impressions of Catherine and her plans were later described in his works on Russia, in his "Philosophical, Historical and Other Notes" and also in the famous *Observations sur l'instruction de S.M.I.* (Commentaries on the Instructions Issued by Her Imperial Majesty). In connection with these commentaries on her orders, Catherine was later to write in an annoyed vein to Friedrich Melchior von Grimm as follows: "This piece is veritable prattle, in which there is neither knowledge of the subject, nor prudence, nor perceptiveness; if my instruction had been in accordance with Diderot's taste, it could have been used to turn everything upside down..."[1]

Diderot had wanted to see in Catherine the ideal of an enlightened monarch, but instead found her to be a tyrant.

Insofar as all hopes of the thinkers of the Enlightenment were based on the Utopian idea that morals and customs can be improved by means of enlightenment, they considered that the only possible way to break free

[1] Cited in: Maurice Tourneux, *Diderot et Catherine II*, Paris, 1899, pp. 519-520.

from the critical social situation in Europe had to be the accession of the "enlightened monarch", who would by every means possible promote the spread of education.

Society, as they saw it, consisted of individuals coming together as a result of a contract between them providing for mutual respect and ensuring the right of everyone to satisfy his personal needs which would not cause anyone else harm. The monarch is conceived of as something in the way of an elected figure, making sure that all the stipulations laid down in the contract are implemented.

Starting out from this premise Diderot came to criticise Catherine. To use his words: "The Empress of Russia is without doubt a despot",[1] in other words she had been the first to break the contract. Admittedly he still wanted to hope that she would renounce this mode of government and convene the commission to draw up laws, to which she had dedicated her *Instructions*...

It was Diderot's firmly held conviction that a ruler should always be mindful of the fact that he governs in the name of the people and for the people: the code of an enlightened monarch ought, according to him, to begin with the following: "We the people and we the sovereign of this people vow to abide by these laws, to which we shall both be subject in equal degree: if we the sovereign are obliged to change them or to break them, becoming an enemy of us the people, then may the people be freed from its vow of loyalty

[1] D. Diderot, *Textes politiques*, Editions sociales, Paris, 1960, p. 63.

and persecute us, may the people depose us and even condemn us to death if the case demands it."[1] In these words the voice of a revolutionary is already making itself heard, ready to take the step from enlightenment to direct action.

Yet for the Encyclopaedists this solution would be considered as extreme: they preferred reforms from above, since in their opinion destructive, ruinous forces were inherent in the revolutionary activities of the masses. The best solution of all would be for the monarch to understand the need for the transformation of society and set a noble example to his subjects. Diderot thus proceeded to draw up for Catherine a detailed plan for the restructuring of the Empire.

She should first of all be mindful of the fact that she was but a representative of her people and for this reason she should bear in mind the people's interests above all else. She should renounce individual rule and convene a commission consisting of representatives of the people so as then to rule together with them. This would rule out the possible risk of despotism. When Catherine responded to this plan by explaining that it was essential that there should be despotism in Russia, since it was demanded by its enormous size, Diderot commented that in that case "Russia was condemned to be badly ruled in nineteen cases out of twenty" for "if thanks to one of these marvels within the natural order, she had three good despots one after

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

the other, that too would be a great disaster for her and for any other nation, in which submission to tyranny were not the habitual state of affairs.

"For these three excellent despots would accustom the nation to blind obedience and during their reigns the people would forget their inalienable rights: they would be lulled into a sense of security and a disastrous apathy: they would no longer experience that continual sense of alarm, the vital upholder of liberty."[1]

"Why was Russia governed less well than France?" Diderot asked and then proffered the reply to this question. "Because the natural liberty of the individual has been reduced there to nothing and the power of the sovereign knows no bounds." Moreover, that was the answer he gave at a time when in France it might well have appeared that there was no freedom and that the Encyclopaedists themselves were being subjected to all manner of persecution!

In his criticism of the way Russia was ruled Diderot referred to the fact that there was but a formal difference between "pure" (i.e. absolute) monarchy and despotism: a despot acts as he pleases without regard for any conventions. For his part a monarch is tied by various forms, which he can however disregard when he thinks fit, but even if the forms are observed all they can do is delay the implementation of the monarch's will, not change it. An absolute monarchy

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

inclines towards despotism and thus it is a "bad mode of government": Diderot himself was to observe that in order to change this state of affairs it was necessary to hand over political and civic power to the people, represented by deputies or a citizens' assembly. Then the assembly could consider, approve or disapprove the wishes of the ruler, whose power would thus be limited.

It is therefore clear that Diderot's dreams were dreams of a constitutional enlightened monarchy and that in his dreams he did not reach out beyond the confines of views typical of his times. He suggested that all class privileges should be done away with, that all citizens should be representatives of the Third Estate, that serfdom should be abolished, that the Church and the government of the state should be kept separate and that the crown should be passed to whichever one of a monarch's descendants should be deemed by a people's government to be the most suitable. All these ideas were in keeping with the spirit of the Utopian ideals of the eighteenth century. The very foundation of the Enlightenment was the idea that the ruler and the ruled should be enlightened.

Diderot tried to impress upon Catherine II that it was essential to bring enlightenment to the people and that the system of government and education in Russia needed to be radically restructured (he drew up a rough plan for her of the way in which education should be made more widely available in Russia; in particular, he recommended that free primary education should be made avail-

able to all) but these plans of his could not possibly have been successfull: Russia was too far removed from these ideas, even when compared to absolutist France. The Enlightenment had penetrated as far as Russia but not beneath the surface. The landowning nobles of Russia did of course read their Voltaire, their Montesquieu and their Diderot, but as far as they were concerned the ideas of the Enlightenment were not something they could take up: they remained no more than a diversion, a fashion, reading matter for the leisured strata of society. The famous Russian historian, Vassili Klyuchevsky shed some light on this response to French ideas: according to him French culture, like Western culture in general, had first reached Russia thanks to Peter the Great, who had literally foisted learning upon his countrymen, compelling the nobles to study, although this activity did not come easily to them and the majority wept tears over their books. Many nobles at the time had travelled abroad to study and on returning home had felt like strangers: those who had studied at home also gradually began to feel uprooted, since the ideas being fed to them were one thing and the real environment in which they found themselves was something quite different. Thus it came about that either the Russian was well acquainted with the nature of the world he lived in but had no ideas regarding that world, which bereft his life of meaning, or he was well acquainted with alien ideas, but knew nothing about the world in which they had sprung

forth, which state of affairs also ended up as meaningless. Klyuchevsky was to write: "Alien words and ideas freed those seeking to educate Russian society from the need to think, just as gratuitous peasant labour freed them from the need to work".[1] The Russian nobleman always considered it to be a heavy burden, the thought that he had not been born a European and had instead to become a European. It was precisely this type of Russian, who, according to Klyuchevsky, had been ruling over the remainder for two hundred years, thanks to his influence on society and thanks to the interest he provided to the historian. The Russian nobleman found himself caught between two patterns of life—one Western and one Eastern—in some empty space where history does not exist. After settling in comfortably on that central reservation between the two worlds, he can enjoy the favours of both, gathering in peasants' taxes on the one hand, and reaping praise for intellectual and aesthetic charitable acts on the other. He tried to feel he belonged while among strangers and only behaved as an outsider in his intimate circle: "In Europe they tried to see him as a Tartar in disguise: he appeared to Russians as a Frenchman born in Russia".[2] A lack of knowledge about what was happening in Russia meant that the nobleman tended to be indifferent and to be disparaging about his native country. In order to conceal this indifference

[1] V. Klyuchevsky, *Collected Works* in five volumes, Vol. 5, Moscow, 1937, p. 197 (in Russian).

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 80.

he would present himself as a citizen of the Universe and thus won for himself a "relatively pleasant existence". Klyuchevsky drew a whole ladder to illustrate the steps in the social heirarchy relating to that particular era in a number of articles, including for example *In Memory of Pushkin* and *Onegin and his Forebears.* The first attempt to portray a Europeanized Russian had been undertaken, as far as he remembered, by Pushkin in *The Negro of Peter the Great,* in the person of Gavril Afanasyevich: this Russian was classified as a European by special decree—he did not fit the category of a Europeanized Russian, but rather one might say he was a Russian caricature of Europeanization, the first such caricature and one that was sour in the extreme. The next step was Prince Vereisky in *Dubrovsky.* He was referred to by Klyuchevsky in the following terms: "a true product of the Catherine era, a flower that had grown up from the soil of the law granting liberties to the gentry and sprinkled with dewdrops of Voltairean enlightenment"[1]... As it gradually took clearer shape this literary type brought forth Mitrofans: to use Klyuchevsky's words once again, Mitrofan, as depicted by the writer Fonvizin, was too extreme a caricature, while the real bearer of that name had been "the most ordinary and normal member of the Russian gentry of moderate means". The life of such Mitrofans was a modest one: they always studied a little, under protest in Peter the Great's

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

reign, with boredom during Catherine's reign, accomplished decidedly nothing, but most decisively, as Klyuchevsky was wont to say, made Russian military history.

Klyuchevsky when concluding his analysis reproached both Peter the Great and Leibnitz, who corresponded with Peter the Great, for the fact that they had held that the less Russia had been prepared for scientific study the easier it would be for it to take root in the country: Klyuchevsky on the other hand was convinced that the soil needed to have been prepared at least in part for this step.

Using examples to illustrate the idea that the influence of the French Enlightenment on Russians was a superficial one, the well-known Russian historian referred to Princess Dashkova, a highly educated woman living in Catherine's reign and President of the Academy of Sciences, who after quarrelling with Catherine and withdrawing from public life had focussed all her devoted attention on tame rats. He exclaimed bitterly: "Only the highly educated people of Catherine's times could start out with Voltaire and end up with tame rats!"[1] The educated members of the Russian nobility, all admirers of Voltaire, would calmly read pages about the rights of man as they sat next to the maid-servants' room (the room in a nobleman's house where the daughters of serfs lived and worked, whose fate was totally in the hands of their landowner master—*Ed.*); they were sincere freethinkers and humanists at heart

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

as they set off to the stables to deal with remiss servants. Klyuchevsky concluded his deadly criticism of educated Russian society of those days with the following words: "In short, there has never been such civilized barbarism in our country as that which held sway during the second half of the eighteenth century. Indifference to their immediate surroundings and the disappearance of any sensitive appreciation in relation to the actual situation pertaining in their own country were the final result of the intellectual and moral fashions in the society of the gentry."[1] There were of course also Russians of a different kind—those who assimilated the views of the French Enlightenment and adopted them as their own convictions, but their number was small.

It was now becoming clear why Diderot could not feel at home in dazzling St. Petersburg society. The ideals of the Enlightenment had awoken a response throughout many strata of French society, while in Russia only a small minority were acquainted with them, and even these few had remained indifferent and this is hardly surprising: France stood on the threshold of bourgeois revolution, the natural expression of many of those ideas, while Russia was still a long way from that revolution.

Diderot returned from Russia a disappointed man. His general feeling of disappointment was made all the stronger by the fact that his negotiations with Catherine regarding

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

a second edition of the *Encyclopédie* in Russia, to which Diderot was prepared to devote the rest of his life, had proved unsuccessful. Neither the "enlightened monarch" nor Russian educated society had justified his expectations.

After returning to France by way of Holland in 1774, Diderot did not leave France again for the rest of his days. During the last years of his life he hardly published anything else, although he was working hard, particularly in his study of the works of the Roman Stoical philosopher Seneca, whom Diderot found a most attractive thinker on account of his moral outlook and profound mind.

Diderot's death on July 31, 1784 robbed the world of an outstanding individual, a talented and gifted man who was one of the most colourful figures in the French Enlightenment.

2. *Diderot as Philosopher*

Numerous historians of philosophy and culture have, during their study of Diderot's writings, brought to our attention the depth of Diderot's mind, the breadth of his erudition and the organizational talents which made him the natural choice for the spiritual mentor of the Encyclopaedists. Until recently it had seemed established beyond question that in the "philosophical orchestra" of his era he had played second fiddle, to Holbach or Helvétius for example, since he had not left to posterity anything similar to their

elegant philosophical systems. The originality of his philosophical thought was seen by many scholars to lie merely in his "maieutic"[1] abilities which served to promote the emergence of other people's systems, but which on the other hand probably provided an obstacle holding back the elaboration of one of his own. Another factor preventing Diderot from elaborating a special philosophical system of his own was, in the view of certain biographers, the universal nature of his erudition, which made it difficult for him to dwell on any single set of premises for long. As a result Diderot is famous for his brilliant and witty work as a propagator of ideas and enlightenment, rather than as a profound and original philosopher. In this connection it is sometimes pointed out that "the genius of Diderot was all-encompassing to such an extent, that he concentrated within himself all the intellectual currents of his time, transforming them as he did so: in order to do him justice any student of his works needs to grasp this universality."[2] Wilhelm Windelband was of the opinion that Diderot was unable to evolve a philosophy of his own, because he himself embodied the process of change in the philosophical thinking of the Enlightenment and provided an expression of its evolution that was more complete than that provided by anyone else. He concluded: "Therefore what we find in him is no static or homogeneous thinking ...

[1] Maieutic (fr. Greek "midwifery")—of or relating to the dialectic method used to elicit ideas.—*Ed.*

[2] *Europäische Aufklarung...*, p. 7.

a chameleon-like genius of this kind was essential, in order that all the component parts of the culture of the time might come together in one person, merging together so that they might be experienced as phases of development in a single individual."[1]

One of Diderot's best-known biographers, Karl Rosenkranz, when turning his attention in particular to Diderot's "maieutic" abilities, insisted that it was only possible to understand Diderot's ideas if it was borne in mind that he had "taught" in the same way as Socrates. This contention corresponds to the words in which Goethe expressed his opinion of Diderot, stressing that the supreme achievement of the human spirit consists in bringing to life another human spirit.

There is no doubt that universality and the "Socratic talent" are features intrinsic to Diderot's mind. However, these features are not sufficient to provide a full picture of the unusual nature of his mode of philosophical argument. Subsequent investigations were to make good this lack, because they were designed to present Diderot as an original philosopher, who provided his own, highly individual answers to questions posed by the time.[2] It is precisely for this reason that it is essential to analyse the era of the Enlighten-

[1] W. Windelband, *Die Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, Vol. 1, Breitkopf und Hartel, Leipzig, 1904, pp. 413-414.

[2] This is true, for example, of the book *Denis Diderot* by I. K. Luppol, first published in Moscow in 1924 and brought out in a third edition there in 1960, and also of the book *L'Esthêtique sans paradoxe de Diderot* by Yvon Belaval published by Gallimard in Paris in 1950.

ment taken as a whole before turning to Diderot's philosophy.

The preoccupations of intellectual life of the period, as mentioned earlier, stemmed from the endeavours of the men of the Enlightenment (who should be taken to include Voltaire, Montesquieu, Diderot, Holbach, Helvétius and many others) to "educate" or "enlighten" all members of society, but in particular to explain what kind of a creature man was and how the social order should be organized in accordance with the demands of his "true nature".

The basis for the views advocated by the thinkers of the Enlightenment was the conception of "natural man", yet even this "natural" quality, as has already been demonstrated, was to emerge as complex, ambivalent and contradictory, and the sources of that contradiction could be traced back to Spinoza's interpretation of Nature as a unity of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. From the point of view of the French materialists, who accepted that principle of Nature as a creative force—*natura naturans*—it exists as an entity, but being at the same time something fashioned by Nature, it is diverse and consists of various parts, a fact which presupposes interaction of the said parts. No one part can exist, without being linked to the others: for this reason the only mode of existence which should be acknowledged as reasonable is that which corresponds not only to the nature of the given individual, but also to the nature of the other parts, to the nature of the whole entity. It therefore fol-

lows that the natural emerges as dependent on the reasonable, which is taken to be the correspondence of the "two" natures—the single and the diverse, the partial and the whole. Holbach expresses this idea in his writings as follows: "I see nothing bad in it or in what it brings forth: all the creatures which come forth from its hands are good, noble and sublime, *as long as they co-operate in producing order and harmony in the sphere in which these need to operate*" (my italics—*T.D.*).[1] It is the original duality of the natural that constitutes the basis of the antinomic essence of all the views propounded by the thinkers of the Enlightenment.

These thinkers however interpret the natural essence of man in a dichotomously splintered way: in his capacity as natural creature, man is selfish, yet being a member of society he is obliged to hold in check his selfish strivings. It is reason that provides the means for "resolving" this contradiction, establishing as it does the correspondence between the natural essence of the individual and his natural environment (society), i.e., reason in the form of reasonable egoism. (A detailed treatment of this question is contained in Z. A. Kamensky's *Filosofskie idei russkogo prosveshcheniya*—The Philosophical Ideas of the Russian Enlightenment—published in Moscow in 1970: pp. 80-118). This unusual interpretation of the essence of man set apart the age of the Enlightenment both from Clas-

[1] Holbach, *Système de la Nature, ou des Loix du Monde Physique et du Monde Moral,* London, 1973, p. 206.

sical times and also from the Middle Ages and saw it as corresponding to the ideal of the emergent bourgeois society.

It was indeed from this new position that the struggle was waged against previous practices and views, recognised as unreasonable, and primarily against religious views. Hegel pointed to the limited relevance of such criticism that had failed to appreciate that the "unreasonable" was deeply rooted in the real world, which failed to view religion as a phenomenon of its own culture and as a result to approach itself from a critical standpoint as well. Later Hegel was to develop the same idea further: "Enlightenment ... takes up a purely negative attitude to belief.... Consequently, neither in this negative, in the content of belief, does it recognize itself.... It has its own being in the opposition of both moments, only one of which—viz. in every case the one opposed to belief—it acknowledges, but cuts off the other from the first, just as belief does. Enlightenment, consequently, does not produce the unity of both as their unity".[1]

In a certain sense Hegel was right to characterise as non-dialectic a way of thinking which was not capable of perceiving something as its own opposite, nor of examining its inner contradictions, and which therefore had to assert itself as something absolute (in this case as something absolutely reasonable as Marx was to write in a subsequent critique).

[1] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1931, p. 682.

It would however hardly be correct to regard this assessment as something absolute, since in that case it would mean that dialectics is only something found ready-made in the German Enlightenment or in German classical philosophy (in the way that Minerva was shown to emerge straight out of the head of Jupiter), while the eras that preceded it (various periods of the Middle Ages, the French Enlightenment, etc.) constitute with regard to their style of thinking examples of metaphysics. This would be a mistake even from Hegel's position, since thinking in its essence is dialectical and cannot be otherwise, since it comes into being as contradiction right from the start.

The distinctive feature of the mode of thought crystallized in the colossal philosophical, logical and general-theoretical synthesis which the *Encyclopédie* represented, was its metaphysical nature. Thought was something which the contributors to the *Encyclopédie* judged mainly on results, and therefore they did not regard it as something contradictory, dynamic or dialectical (whereas in the processes which actually took place thought was always something evolving dialectically). Making so bold as to paraphrase Engels' words relating to Heinrich Heine[1], it can be said that in the age of the Enlightenment there was at least one man by whom the mode of thought peculiar to those times

[1] "But what neither the government nor the liberals saw was seen at least by one man as early as 1833, and this man was indeed none other than Heinrich Heine."—K. Marx, F. Engels, *Selected Works,* Vol. 3, p. 337.

was seen as dialectical, and that was none other than Denis Diderot.

Further elucidation of the above arguments is called for: first of all, it is necessary to say a few words about those features of the Encyclopaedists' thinking which had been shaped by the emergence of so-called positive science, and by the change, in view of the latter, of the role of philosophy in the system of knowledge as a whole.

For the philosophers of the Enlightenment, speaking in the name of science, philosophy had lost its former privileges and now had to assume a place subordinate to that accorded to natural sciences: it was no longer recognized as an independent discipline, for, as they saw it, that would have signified a rebirth of its mediaeval, scholastic form, whereas they were of the opinion that philosophy should become a reflection of science. In other words, philosophy needed to summarize, to draw general conclusions from various uncoordinated conceptions of the world and Man: moreover, just as in the natural sciences, so in philosophy, the sum of knowledge needed to be expressed in terms of unambiguous results, i.e. results free of contradictions. This approach was reflected in works by prominent representatives of French materialism such as Holbach's *Système de la Nature* (The System of Nature), Helvétius' *De l'Esprit* (Essays on the Mind) and *De l'Homme* (Of Man) and La Mettrie's *L'Homme-machine* (Machine-Man). In these works everything was expressed in distinct definite terms: matter is seen as the only substance, consisting

of minute and indivisible particles linking together in various bodies thanks to their intrinsic capacity for movement: men, in their turn, are viewed as natural creatures also possessed of an inclination for drawing together to form a common whole, namely society.

Diderot shared these ideas, which find expression in one form or another in the writings of all the contributors to the *Encyclopédie*; at the same time—unexpectedly even for himself—he found that the knowledge attained through the natural sciences and philosophy failed in a certain sense to correspond to the process of its discovery. If a conclusion was not contradictory and perfectly clear, that did not mean that the thinking "on the way" to it should necessarily be referred to as straightforward: all the time it kept going off at a tangent, as it were, from the true path in one direction or another and could even start contradicting itself. By way of illustration one could cite the assertion made by materialist thinkers of that time, to the effect that only iron-clad necessity dominated in the world. It will be noted that in seeking to prove this, strange though it may seem, the thought process was obliged to branch into two, and divide its arguments evenly on both the side of necessity and that of chance. This question will be treated in more detail later on: suffice it for the time being to point out that Diderot, on the one hand, noticed this inconsistency, but on the other he stimulated an interest in the contradictory movement of thought, referring to both phenomena as paradoxes.

Herein lies one of the distinctive features of Diderot's thinking, referred to as Socratic by many researchers: in this, as we see it, there lies at least a partial explanation for the fact, singled out by numerous scholars, that Diderot had not evolved an integral philosophical system such as that found in Holbach's *Système de la Nature*. On the one hand this appears like a shortcoming, but at the same time this shortcoming turns into a kind of virtue, since Diderot's "Socratic thinking", that breaks down any system, makes it possible to lay bare the essential, albeit not immediately obvious, features of the philosophy of the French Enlightenment and the materialism of the eighteenth century.

Indeed while Holbach formulated more clearly, more consistently and even more uncompromisingly the materialists' basic attainments of knowledge relating to the world, to Man and Society, Diderot's strength lay elsewhere: he shed light for us—and to a significant extent deliberately—on the inner workings of the mode of thought characteristic of all the Encyclopaedists, regardless of the extent to which they might differ from one another when it came down to details. It can be said that Diderot was interested not only in what his contemporaries thought but also in how they might be reaching their conclusions and the way in which their reasoning on some subject or other might evolve. He tried, if one can use the expression, to light on a thought in its own refuge, to grasp it, not when it was already complete and everything that had taken place within its

innermost recesses would be hidden forever from the outside observer, but precisely at the moment when it was only just taking shape, when it was still possible to penetrate its "witches' kitchen" and try and understand how an easily definable dish could result from a mysterious mixture of herbs. In this work of singling out the inner patterns of thought, Diderot accomplished far more than Holbach or Helvétius. Diderot's persistence enabled him to reveal in the thinking of his time what he referred to as paradoxality: he often used this term without providing any strictly logical definition of its meaning; not is it always invested with the significance which it later possessed, when it was the subject of a special analysis in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (The Paradox of Acting). In that work the term paradox implies the link between two opposed possibilities in relation to the existence of the actor and the transfer from one to the other. In most cases, a paradox for Diderot is a disparity, already referred to, between the process and the result of thought (the *what* and the *how*) and can also be the contradictory nature of any incomplete reasoning. When singling out these paradoxes Diderot often deliberately brought about a collision between contradictory features in Man's character, between diametrically opposite aspects of an object, and so on.

At first glance this strange predilection of the man behind the *Encyclopédie* for paradoxes appears as no more than an original aspect of his taste, but if we approach the question more carefully, then it emerges that

a paradox for Diderot was the form in which, thanks to his "Socratic style", Diderot was able to lend meaning to the dialectical nature of the thinking that found generalized expression in the *Encyclopédie*. Moreover, as we shall try to make clear, this external, as it might seem, feature of his thinking (which in actual fact was immanent) allowed him to single out the contradictions to be found within those conclusions of the materialists relating to matter and movement, that were seen by the thinkers of the Enlightenment as, on the whole, rigidly simple. More of this later. After concentrating his attention on the analysis of thought processes Diderot went further, to establish that the methods and goals behind research, used in natural science and philosophy, were different: the natural scientist always demands to have an unambiguous conclusion while the philosopher needs to understand that within this conclusion there lies hidden a concealed contradiction and that it will come to light instantaneously, as soon as the logical demonstration in defence of some principle is carried forward to its crisis point. He immediately fixes his attention, and also that of the reader, on the fact that proof aimed at achieving a simple conclusion, is always being interrupted by another proof, which testifies in favour of the opposite opinion, so that there emerges a paradoxical element in any solution. It thus becomes quite impossible to get rid of this ambivalence; moreover, all attempts to eliminate one paradox lead to the discovery of more and more new ones. Does not

this therefore mean that side by side with the logic of the natural sciences, the logic "of one voice" and free of contradictions, there exists another—a logic for the philosopher, one that has two voices, a logic of paradoxality and "dialogue"?

Diderot's advantage over Holbach and Helvétius and many other materialists lies precisely in the fact that he did not try to create his "own" philosophical system, perhaps precisely because the "systematic" philosophy of those times, if one can term it such, deliberately ignored contradictions (being, as it was, metaphysical), while for Diderot the point of philosophical argument consisted in singling out paradoxes. This enabled him to single out the potentialities of opposites concealed within the materialism of his times and to reveal its inner dialectic. While for Holbach and Helvétius the only form for studying real thought was the logic of science (in practice philosophy was seen as synonymous with this logic, insofar as it had been recognized as its reflection), for Diderot, and probably no other thinker in the French Enlightenment, philosophical thought right from the start had not coincided with scientific thought: it had been concerned with that "paradoxical residue" which appears after any scientific analysis. Diderot's arguments which might, after a first superficial glance, seem eclectic are always thought through in depth and subordinated to his overall design, to his seeking out of paradoxes. In this respect Helvétius' reproach to the effect that Diderot was excessively methodical, amounted to a

reproach that he was not being dialectical; it was not a meaningless demand by an eclectic that Diderot should turn a system into chaos. Diderot's requirement was that a subject should be analysed from two opposite poles, as it were, and that not one supposition, not one hypothesis should be abandoned "without it having been put through the *inversion* test first".[1] Only when we bear in mind all the time the "paradoxality" in Diderot's thinking is it possible to explain why almost all his works are written in the form of dialogues and why it is that in those passages where the narrative is a monologue, the dialogue is nevertheless dove-tailed into the text and appears as an integral part of the latter. As remarked upon by one of the contemporary students of Diderot's writings, Werner Kraus, the crux of the matter is that "Diderot felt a deep need not only to draw an anonymous public into the process of his creation, but rather his contemporaries living alongside him".[2] The role of the public in this case calls upon its members to be not merely spectators, but opponents of the actual hero, looking for weak points in his views, so as to criticize them and compel him to substantiate his point of view more convincingly. It is evident that Diderot did not choose the medium of dialogue by accident. One of the leading authorities on Diderot, the American philosopher and literary historian Herbert Dieckmann, also focusses attention on the fact that the dialogue form

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 2, p. 189.
[2] *Sinn und Form,* 14, Jahr. 1962, 2 Heft, S. 162.

of exposition constitutes a special device for arriving at truths. While sharing his opinion, we should like to add at the same time that dialogue, in our view, is the most appropriate form for the presentation of the paradoxes of the Enlightenment. As will be made clear later, in the novels *Le Neveu de Rameau* (Rameau's Nephew) and *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (Jacques the Fatalist and His Master) Rameau and the philosopher, and Jacques and his master adopt diametrically opposed stands and it is precisely the dialogue form that makes it possible to draw the sharpest possible dividing line between their points of view. Yet this is not the only function of the dialogue form used by Diderot. This form of exposition also makes it clear that while the heroes themselves may not wish to do so, they shift over to the position of their opponents while substantiating their own views. Paradoxality now manifests itself in the fact that the more consistently and rigidly a premise is demonstrated, the larger looms the threat to its survival, strange though it may seem: for instance, the proof for the fact that all that exists in the world is necessity, suddenly turns inside out into a reduction of necessity to the level of coincidence, a phenomenon on which the founders of Marxism dwelt at length on a number of occasions when criticising mechanistic determinism. This "reduction to the opposite" cannot in essence mean anything else but that the antithesis in concealed form is already present within the thesis, and that precisely as a result of this, the argument between the heroes is at

the same time an argument between each hero and himself, and this testifies to the contradictory nature of the conception as a whole. In order to make this clear, however, it is necessary, in any case, to take an argument to its logical extreme, so that, to use Hegel's words, the coincidence of opposites should emerge. Diderot achieves this with masterly skill: the dialogues in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* and elsewhere concentrate the reader's attention on the paradoxes—freedom vs. necessity, freedom vs. coincidence, and so on.

In this way contradictions in the form of a paradox constitute for Diderot a logical feature of the thought of the Enlightenment. For him no "removal" of contradictions, in the Hegelian sense, takes place here; there is no third element, no synthesis, the aspects of which are both the thesis and the antithesis. In order to appreciate the dialectical nature of Diderot's thinking, however, it is not necessary to place it on the same footing as Hegel's.

Admittedly certain writers saw this as grounds for accusing Diderot of irrationalism:[1] as we see it, however, there is nothing irrational either here or in Hegel's explanation. In terms of conventional reasoning both the paradox and the identity of opposites appear irrational, insofar as in both cases we are dealing with contradictions. But from the

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[1] Herbert Dieckmann, "Diderot's Conception of Genius", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. II, No. 2, April 1941, pp. 151-182.

philosophical point of view there is nothing irrational in either of them, for each principle constitutes a special mode of exposition for contradictions and at the same time a special form of existence for contradictions.

It is in its deliberate "paradoxality" (i.e. dialectical quality) that Diderot's thought differs from that of Holbach and Helvétius. For them there is no doubt regarding the absence of contradictions in their own philosophical conceptions: for Diderot, meanwhile, a conception is "charged" with a contradiction right from the start. Yet in order to pinpoint that contradiction it is necessary to take the conclusions stemming from the initial premises to their logical conclusion. Only then will the conception's inner tension be revealed. As Diderot himself was to point out, "in order to undermine a hypothesis all that is necessary sometimes is to take it as far as it will go".[1]

The arguments put forward by Holbach and Helvétius concerning the domination of necessity in the world emerge on closer study as "deviations toward the opposite" not noticed by the authors themselves, however strange it may sound. Acknowledgement, for instance, of the fact that all our actions have inevitable causes, does not, in Holbach's view, rule out confidence in the fact that, if a man has courage then he can criticise bad behaviour in other people and change it. "However inevitable might be the cause giving rise to passions, the legislator sets himself the task

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 2, p. 196.

of holding their effect in check, and if he sets about this in a proper fashion, he will be sure of success."[1] Holbach did not see the contradiction here, because although it is possible to talk about freedom in relation to our immediate actions (otherwise the thinkers of the Enlightenment would not have appealed for change in the existing order of things), with relation to the world as a whole (of which Man is a part) only necessity should be acknowledged. In ordinary life man acts as he considers necessary, but after making a logical study of daily occurrences, the scholar must come to the conclusion that everything is necessary, and this conclusion is the result of an interpretation of reality within the framework of the logic inherent in natural science in the New Age (in which iron-clad necessity reigned supreme). Philosophical reasoning, however, brings to light contradictions where they are not found by reasoning based on the logic of natural science. Only the fact that Diderot was a philosopher in the true sense of the word enabled him to reveal the contradiction of necessity vs. coincidence and necessity vs. freedom.

True to his own "paradox" principle, Diderot first took the views of mechanistic determinism to their logical limit—namely fatalism. Indeed if each single cause could only give rise to one single effect, then the world would appear as an endless chain of such cause-and-effect sequences, then everything

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[1] Holbach, *Système de la Nature, op. cit.*, p. 190.

which exists would only exist in such a way and in no other: everything would be conditioned in advance and predetermined by a distant cause-and-effect chain, for it is inevitable that the present flows out of the past. Yet as soon as one has acknowledged this conclusion as correct, then the paradox comes to light: if everything predetermined then anything which might happen is justified; yet that is tantamount to an absence of rigid predetermination.

If a man cannot act differently from the way he does, he is then in practice behaving in such a way as if there is no fate: does not fatalism require as its supplement freedom, which is interpreted here as a negation of the rigid preconditioning of man's actions, the impossibility of reducing his behaviour to any single pattern?

Both these possibilities, which complement each other, are contained in concealed form within mechanistic determinism, constituting its inherently contradictory nature. Among the thinkers of the French Enlightenment only Diderot was up to pinpointing this contradiction. After setting himself the goal of indicating the paradoxality of the thought of his times, he turned to an analysis not only of thought rooted in natural science but also of conventional reasoning that formed part of the process of real life. Only this made it possible for him to obtain material, without which pinpointing the contradiction would have been an extremely difficult undertaking, since, as mentioned earlier, natural science deliberately ruled out contradic-

tions. The novels Diderot wrote that were a follow-on from his study of conventional reasoning, namely *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Jacques le fataliste*, can with ample justification be classified as works of fiction. Yet at the same time they constitute philosophical dialogues since their "protagonist" is the mode of thought of that age, considered from the angle of its dialectical potential. It was precisely this that gave Engels grounds for his comment that "outside philosophy in the restricted sense, the French nevertheless produced masterpieces of dialectic"[1] and for referring to the work *Le Neveu de Rameau* in this connection.

The story of this novel is unique of its kind. This work was first published in Germany with the direct involvement of Goethe: in 1804 Schiller had handed Goethe Diderot's manuscript and asked him to translate it into German. Goethe found this task most fascinating. As he himself said, he put his whole heart and soul into the work. Soon afterwards Schiller died and it was not clear where the manuscript had disappeared to, which meant that Goethe was later unable to explain either from where Schiller had received it or what had become of it.

When work began in Paris a few years later on an edition of Diderot's writings, two unknown young men presented what they claimed was Diderot's original manuscript for inclusion in the edition. At the same time the publisher Brière received from

[1] F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring, op. cit.*, p. 30.

Diderot's daughter another manuscript, which according to her was a copy of the original that Diderot himself had made in 1760. This gave the publisher grounds for accusing the young men of forgery. Goethe was called upon to give judgement as a disinterested third party and he opted in favour of the copy presented to Brière by Diderot's daughter.

There was a good deal of sensational controversy in connection with *Le Neveu de Rameau.* The critics could not agree in their efforts to determine Diderot's grand design: some considered that he had been aiming to depict the life of a good-for-nothing, others that he wanted to satirize contemporary bourgeois society. These is no doubt that both elements are to be found in the novel. As we see it, however, this work also reflects Diderot's philosophical programme, nowhere else are the paradoxes inherent in the thinking of the Enlightenment so cogently expressed. The unusual elegance of the exposition, the profundity of the ideas and the dazzling wit in this work led Marx to name Diderot as his favourite writer of prose.

If we seek to define the subject of this work, there is not really one at all. In an argument between the musician Rameau and a philosopher questions as to the essence of Man and the principles underlying the structure of society are discussed, as is the correlation between the natural and the reasonable, the link between necessity and freedom, etc. Yet these "eternal" problems are presented here from the style of thought

typical of the eighteenth century, and Diderot's interpretation of this enables the reader to judge just how original Diderot was from a philosophical point of view.

After a first reading of *Le Neveu de Rameau* it might initially seem that the views expressed by one of the characters, the philosopher, reflect the position adopted by Diderot himself, but later it emerges most clearly that the contrasting, to use Hegel's words, of the "unfortunate" (Rameau) and the "honest" (philosopher) mind was part of Diderot's overall plan. Moreover, it also comes to light that he had set himself the task of showing the limitations of both of these characters and the ensuing need for viewing them as mutually complementary. In other words, while Diderot's views were not accurately reflected in either character in particular, they were probably embodied in the two taken together, insofar as the whole pattern of thought of the bourgeois era was "disjointed".

The form of a dialogue makes it possible to develop fully the paradoxical reasoning of each of the characters, which in some inscrutable way leads to substantiation of the opposite point of view: the initial mutual negation of each other's ideas is turned round to become the mutual assertion of the opposite. The incompatibility of the views is expressed, in particular, in the fact that they are defended by such very different people, but the strange transition of each person to the position of the other, in its turn, testifies not only to the argument of the heroes with

each other, but also to the argument of each with himself and herein lies the inner dialogistic quality of each voice (Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin on the inner contradictions in dialogue in his work *Tvorchestvo Dostoevskogo*—The Writing of Dostoevsky—published in Moscow and Leningrad in 1965).

The argument between the protagonists begins with an assessment of Rameau's life, which the characters provide in connection with an attempt to elucidate the concepts of the Natural and the Reasonable. Here begins the divergence between the views of the philosopher, a man leading an honest, upright life in keeping with his ideals, and the good-for-nothing Rameau. But is the philosopher really so true to his ideals and is Rameau really so base? Rameau does anything to please, and becomes a flatterer, liar, slanderer, etc., as he himself explains, in order to secure his daily bread; admittedly the feeling of hunger (as indeed other needs) does not exist for him in a primitive form, but is a civilized one, thanks to the age in which he happens to live (and here light is already being shed on an aspect of the "natural" such as the influence of society and culture). However, it is precisely for this reason that Rameau requires broader scope for the satisfaction of his needs. He has to have "...a good bed, good food, warm clothes in winter, cool clothes in summer, rest and money and many other things..."[1] The reader may well question whether a

[1] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 326.

man deserves to receive all this from the hands of generous patrons, rather than obtaining it through his own labour, but there can be no doubt about the fact that without these things man cannot survive. For this reason, in answer to the philosopher's reproach that he behaves in a base way, in that he commits unseemly acts for the sake of satisfying his needs, Rameau first agrees with him, but then adds that while achieving his ends by these means, he is not coercing himself into anything, but acting in accordance with his own nature. He addresses to himself and the philosopher the following question: "And as for friend Rameau, if one day he began to show contempt for wealth, women, good fare and idleness [and] to be censorious like Cato, what would he be? A hypocrite. Rameau has to be what he is".[1] The mere act of asking this question as to why unaccommodating, callous and irritable people are so often to be encountered, was sufficient for it to be obvious that they have spoilt their own character by foisting upon themselves a task not in keeping with their nature. Man must be himself or otherwise subordinate himself to those needs with which nature has endowed him. Rameau carries this idea further: "If by any chance virtue had led to fortune, either I should have been virtuous, or I should have pretended to be like anyone else ... *as for vice, nature had seen to that by herself*" (my italics—*T.D.*).[2]

Here Rameau expresses the viewpoint

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 272.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 286.

which essentially ought to have been defended not by him, but by the philosopher educated in the spirit of the ideas of the Enlightenment: if in Man everything is of necessity determined by Nature, it would not simply be stupid, but senseless to stand in Nature's way; Man as he is, whether good or bad, would have been "programmed" in advance (i.e., before his birth) by a chain of causes; so can he be criticised for the way he is, and for not being different, can the state of affairs be changed? The fact that Rameau, for all intents and purposes, at this point in the duet plays the part of the philosopher and enlightener was singled out by, among others, Karl Rosenkranz, who asks, "But which system is it then that Rameau defends? It is the system of the atheistic, materialist philosophy. Rameau is an atheist... Everything starts out from Nature, from matter, from cause, from sensuality. Who had consistently upheld the materialist standpoint with regard to morality and education? Helvétius, that compassionate, well-meaning, upright Helvétius, towards whom the sponger Palissot had been so ungrateful as to make fun of him and his household in a comedy. Had not Helvétius taught in his book *De l'Esprit* (Essays on the Mind) that everything is feeling, even thinking is feeling, that judgement is feeling, i.e. that no purely ideal spirit independent of matter exists",[1] then perhaps Rameau would not have been able to justify his existence? Indeed, what else might Rameau

[1] K. Rosenkranz, *Diderot's Leben und Werke*, Brockhaus, Leipzig, 1866, p. 111.

glean from Helvétius' reasoning concerning the fact that the wish for delights is not a vice, because "the desire of pleasure be the true principle of all our thoughts and of all of our actions...",[1] or from Holbach's assertions to the effect that according to Nature's plan "certain soils bring forth delicious fruits, while others supply only thorns and dangerous plants"[2] and that this also applies to men?

Yet when Rosenkranz insists that "the refutation of these views presupposed the concept of freedom and independence, a concept which is meaningless from the materialist standpoint, since according to that point of view everything that exists is only a mechanical movement of atoms",[3] he obviously fails to understand the antinomic quality of the thought of the Enlightenment, insofar as he does not see that it is precisely none other than the philosopher who defends freedom. After all, using the words of Holbach once again, it cannot be said that "our nature renders us evil";[4] it is the way man is brought up that should be held responsible, which is also what Helvétius maintained.

Insofar as Diderot is trying to identify a contradiction, he succeeds in the course of an intensive argument between Rameau and the philosopher in taking to their logical conclusion the views of the Enlightenment thinkers

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[1] C. A. Helvétius, *De l'Esprit; or Essays on the Mind and Its Several Faculties*, J. M. Richardson, London, 1809, pp. 30-31.

[2] Holbach, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

[3] K. Rosenkranz, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

[4] Holbach, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

in which the Natural was presented as identical with what is both individual and natural, and this point prove their undoing: not everything in the individual is reasonable and not every natural man is ideal; what would be reasonable is a combination of the individual nature and the social nature. The philosopher himself is obliged to accept this on the grounds that he cannot agree with the conclusions drawn by Rameau, but since these conclusions stem from philosophical premises, the philosopher hastens to reinterpret them in a new direction, thus bringing to light their inner contradictions. It is precisely the philosopher who begins to deviate from the idea of the absolute naturalness (necessity) of all needs, veering towards the principle of their reasonable limitation, and ultimately he begins to advocate ascetism and abstinence. He acknowledges: "The good things in life have their price, no doubt; but you don't know the price of what you are sacrificing in order to obtain them."[1] (That, however, already presupposes freedom.) After exclaiming: "To insult science and virtue in order to live, that is a really high price to pay for bread!", he goes on to insist that "it would be better to shut oneself up in one's attic, drink water, eat dry bread and search one's own soul".[2] In the end the philosopher calls upon everyone not only to limit their needs, but even to renounce them. One can come to this conclusion after having become a philosopher, because it is

[1] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 326.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 319.

only philospoher "who has nothing and who asks for nothing".[1] With ample justification Rameau asks at this point: "And where is such a creature to be found? If he has nothing he must suffer; if he begs for nothing he'll get nothing, and he'll go on suffering".[2] In this way it is only under pressure from Rameau that the social aspects of the ideal of Man become apparent. Yet at this point another question arises: Can Man somehow set himself free from his own individuality, conditioned by Nature, if to that end he has no suitable means, such as freedom? Here the argument moves on to another plane and now centres round the problem of education. Again Rameau appears to win while standing up for the ideas which the philosopher ought to have been defending. To use Rameau's own words, education cannot change man to a substantial degree, because all his qualities are sown within him by Nature itself. When answering the philosopher's question as to how it came about that he, being such a sensitive connoisseur of the beautiful, had proved totally blind to the "beauties of the moral kind" and insensitive to the "charms of virtue", Rameau replies that it is "the molecule" that is guilty in this matter. "My father's blood and my uncle's blood are the same blood: my blood is the same as my father's. The paternal molecule was hard and obtuse; and that cursed paternal molecule has assimilated all the rest."[3] The

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 325.
[2] *Ibidem.*
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 310.

argument continues in a similar vein when the subject changes to the education of Rameau's son. In answer to the question as to whether he is not trying somehow to paralyse within him the action of the cursed molecule, Rameau proceeds as follows: "I think that such an endeavour would be quite useless. If he is destined to be a good man, I shall not prevent it. But if the molecule has determined that he is to be a rogue like his father, the trouble I should have taken to make an honest man of him would do him a great deal of harm. As his education would be continually thwarting the tendency of the molecule, he would be pulled by two contrary forces, and would walk all awry along the path of life".[1]

Unlike Rameau the philosopher defends human freedom, thanks to which man can free himself from evil inclinations, and as a result from the predetermination of his actions.

It would be quite wrong to ignore the fact that the argument between the philosopher and Rameau is a dialogue for two voices within the framework of a single conception: after all, both Holbach and Helvétius, while acknowledging the absolute natural necessity of all human actions, nevertheless assert that education has a function, namely to modify those actions. Although these two voices are to be heard together all the time, neither of the philosophers see the dialogue as a duet: Holbach does not find any contradiction in his

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 311.

words to the effect that "regardless of whether these members of society act in accordance with necessity, or are free in their actions, it is enough for them to know that these actions can be modified".[1] Holbach does not notice that this statement regarding the "natural" and "reasonable" character of all man's needs clashes with his conclusions to the effect that "Nature does not make men good or evil", just as Helvétius fails to notice it. While reasoning within the framework of simple logic, the "logic of inference" accepted by natural scientists, they always see before them only one path, while Diderot finds a "paradoxical" movement in any, even a seemingly indivisible, element. He intensifies the contradiction, divides it and ascribes to it the characteristics of different *dramatis personae*, whom he makes argue with each other; in this argument it comes to light that in the argument between the two characters each is also at odds with himself as well. Precisely for this reason Rameau and the philosopher keep changing places, at times taking up each other's refrain (and thereby drowning their former "tune"). Diderot's achievement lies in the fact that unlike Holbach or Helvétius he captures this "duet", regarding it as an inalienable part of the thinking of his times.

This two-edged truth of the Enlightenment is brought out in the argument between Rameau and the philosopher concerning education. If everything is natural and reasonable, then "what is a good education, if not that

[1] Holbach, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

which leads to all sorts of pleasure, without danger and without difficulty?"[1] Carrying this idea forward Rameau comes to the conclusion that having allowed his little wild savage of a son to grow up like the grass out in the fields (the choice of this image is, in itself, far from being a coincidence), he now found that the boy would like to dress in rich clothes, eat like a king, be spoilt by men, loved by women and take advantage of all the good things life had to offer. There seemed to be nothing really evil about this; however, if these "natural" wishes were to be taken to their logical conclusion, then it would have to be acknowledged that if the little savage were to continue to be so unreasonable, then when to childlish foolishness were added the turbulent passions of a thirty-year-old man then "he would wring his father's neck and go to bed with his mother".[2]

It is none other than the philosopher who regards it as essential not simply to develop these natural characteristics which are inherent in man from birth, but to bring up the boy as a creature capable of changing his needs in accordance with the interests of society. In order to understand these interests correctly, man has to be enlightened. Diderot asks his reader what the "voice of Nature" has to say on the subject and then replies that it requires of us that we should be happy. Then in answer to a further question as to whether Man should go against the voice of Nature, the answer comes back in the negative, since

[1] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 316.
[2] *Ibidem.*

both the most virtuous and the most depraved of men are subject to that voice in equal degree. While admitting that Nature speaks to them in different tongues the argument is carried forward with the exhortation for all men to become enlightened and with the reminder that then Nature will speak to all men in the language of virtue.

Fifty years later Marx was to appreciate the limitations of the views of the Enlightenment thinkers, in particular in their failure to understand that the coincidence of processes involved in the change of circumstances and change within the individual takes place in the practical working of revolution and "that educators themselves must be educated". In this respect Diderot did not progress beyond the ideas of his times, but still, the originality of his philosophical thought enabled him to point out the special functions of education within class society, where these functions place limitations on the individual and foster in him not an all-round personality but a bourgeois one. After singling out the antinomic nature of the concepts of the natural and the reasonable (in this case reasonable education is what the writer had in mind) Diderot was able to approach an understanding of the real contradictions inherent in bourgeois society, that was coming into being, and the alienation of man within that society.

When he moves on to consider the question of morality Diderot again finds a contradiction, which Holbach and Helvétius had "failed" to notice. Holbach, of course, could not bring himself to ignore reproaches of amorality

which in those days were being levelled at the thinkers of the Enlightenment by the representatives of mechanistic determinism in connection with the fact that arguments concerning universal necessity could lead to a blurring if not even to the annihilation of such concepts as justice and injustice, good and evil.

In the opinion of Holbach, suspicions of immorality are easy to reject, because "although man acts in a necessary way in everything that he does, his actions are just, good and laudable every time that they are of real benefit to his fellowmen and to the society in which he lives",[1] and "thus not only is the teaching regarding necessity true and founded on reliable facts, but it also establishes morality on an unshakeable base".[2]

Diderot was unable to disagree with this. However, for him the parodox of necessity vs. freedom stands out in this homogenous and indivisible system of ideas like a two-faced Janus.

For the philosopher, Rameau's behaviour, beyond any doubt, is amoral: he is surprised at Rameau, assuming that he does after all possess a "sensitive soul". Rameau does not agree with this, saying that he has "a mind as round as a bowl, and a character as pliable as that of a willow tree".[3] These words sound perfectly natural coming from the lips of a man who considers, following in the footsteps of all the finest representatives of his age that, being

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[1] Holbach, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 201.
[3] Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1966, p. 77.

a product of Nature, Man should not be ashamed of his needs and desires: he expresses the urge to satisfy these needs and, in view of this, his actions cannot possibly be qualified as either evil or good. All that can be said is that men are different and that their forms of behaviour also differ.

Nevertheless in Rameau's "revolt" (there is no other name for the action which appears to be a contradiction of all his views and his way of life) his indignation at his own baseness and the role of jester, that he has been compelled to play, comes to the surface. The moment arrives when briefly he renounces his life and asserts human dignity: "There must be a certain dignity inherent in man's nature," he exclaims, "that nothing can suppress. It is aroused for no apparent reason; yes, for no reason, for on certain other days it would not cost me nothing to be as base as you like..."[1] This inner divergence of views seems to give the philosopher grounds to assume that Rameau possesses a "sensitive soul" and as a result of this even to reproach him with a lack of integrity of character that would be worthy of respect. At the same time, however, the philosopher does not notice that his own views are also lacking in integrity. This is something Diderot duly "observes", since the whole plan of *Le Neveu de Rameau* was subordinated to the task of singling out paradoxes in the thinking of the Enlightenment. The shift of the opponents to each other's standpoint, that may appear incomprehensible at first, and their

[1] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 251.

return to their points of departure bear witness to the ineradicable nature of the contradiction.

The result of this method of perusal is a different understanding of integrity that characterises the thinking of the New Age: integrity is defined as something heterogeneous, split within itself; "split consciousness" becomes a proper representative of the thinking of the new type (for honest consciousness is in its turn heterogenous), insofar as man in bourgeois society can exist only as a "split individual". Precisely for this reason Diderot's sympathy, strange though this may seem, leans more towards Rameau, since he is more sincere in his contradictoriness and, as a result, a more fully integrated individual. To use Diderot's own words, Rameau "was neither more nor less abominable than they; he was only franker and more consistent, and sometimes profound in his depravity".[1] This, in its turn, made possible a somewhat different understanding of the problem of necessity versus freedom: the "integral man" has now been split down the middle—he is passionate and seen to rein in his passions, he is at one and the same time miserly and generous, greedy and unselfish, and so on and so forth. For this reason a man cannot be defined with reference to any particular one of these characteristics. On the contrary, it emerges that necessity itself, fate or destiny split and that between the shoots leading off in various directions freedom wedges its way, freedom

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 314.

that is being interpreted for the time being as the irreducibility of man to any one of the definitions so far provided for him. (A more detailed analysis of the necessity versus freedom dilemma was provided by Diderot in the novel *Jacques le fataliste...* (Jacques the Fatalist and His Master). In a certain sense man becomes *cause sui*, taking shape only via dialogue and argument involving his opposed possibilities.

Here it is worth dwelling on the fact that the effectiveness of the analysis of developing bourgeois society, through revelation of its contradictions, strange though it may seem, stems from Diderot's somewhat limited approach to Man, which all of a sudden turned out to be an advantage. While Holbach and Helvétius, having taken the standpoint of mechanistic determinism, viewed society as a totality of atomized homogenous units, to a certain extent the psychological interpretation preferred by Diderot brought in its wake a rather different interpretation of man. The mechanistic approach in this case had its strong and at the same time weak aspects in that the individual was always approached as "man in general"; after this levelling out, all individuality had been removed. The psychological angle, however, made it possible for Diderot to emphasize the individual features that make every man an individual unique whose properties could not be represented as an arithmetical mean taken from the totality of properties found in all members of society, and who in his development is determined not only by social necessity but has his own ideas, which

find expression in an unending inner dialogue. Thanks to this conclusion Diderot was able to depict the contradictions of capitalist society as inner contradictions, distinctive on each particular occasion, of the individual appearing simultaneously as *homo faber* and as consumer, as a social being and as an egoist. To the extent to which Rameau indulges in "free art", i.e. music, he—while ceasing to "concern himself with the base needs of contemptible life"—turns into a sponger, and this, in its turn, has a ruinous influence upon his productive capacity. (Rameau's *declassé* status and the fact that his interests are not in tune with the greedy spirit of the bourgeois stem to a certain extent from his position as creative artist.) The contradiction of "producer" vs. "consumer" illustrates the collapse of the bourgeois ideal of man.

Due credit should be given to Diderot's mind and powers of perception: at the dawn of capitalism he was already able to see the *cul de sacs* in which it would find itself and describe it as a social condition in which "one set of social estates devours others", when some groups grow rich at the expense of others, when in order to avoid poverty people deliberately stifle within themselves their finest human qualities.

All the above makes *Le Neveu de Rameau* one of Diderot's finest works, not only from the point of view of logic but also on the strength of its sociological analysis.

The issue of necessity versus freedom in the arguments between Rameau and the philosopher brought problems in its wake. New twists

to this problem with new complications appear in the dialogue between Jacques and his master in another remarkable work by Diderot, *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (Jacques the Fatalist and His Master). The destiny of this novel was similar to that of *Le Neveu de Rameau* and once again there was a link with German writers, in particular with Schiller.

This novel was written by Diderot in about 1773, i.e. the time when he undertook the journey to Holland and St. Petersburg. Soon afterwards some copies of the manuscript made their way to Germany from Holland, that is the manuscript of a particular episode from the novel, namely "La vengeance de Madame de la Pommeraye" (Mme de la Pommeraye's Revenge). This was translated and published in 1785 by Schiller. The fate of these two novels reflects the keen interest shown by German writers in French literature, and the close links between the French and the German Enlightenment. It was indeed in Germany in 1792 that the complete text of *Jacques le fataliste* first appeared. In 1780 Goethe spoke of *Jacques le fataliste* as a truly magnificent work, describing it as a subtle elegant dish, that might have been destined for some idol. He went on to say that he would be ready to take the place of that idol himself, so as to spend six hours without stopping consuming all the delights on offer in whatever order and to whatever end that first-class chef and *maître d'hotel* might stipulate.

Goethe's words testify to the undoubted artistic merits of the work, but that is not

its only value. The novel provides a subtle philosophical analysis of the paradoxes characteristic of the age of the Enlightenment and it is of interest to us first and foremost because of that aspect.

The "hero" of the novel is again the mode of thought peculiar to that age with its antinomic qualities. It is expressed in the disputes between the master and his servant, as they go on their travels discussing man's freedom of will and the predetermination of his various actions.

Diderot points out that the resolution of this particular issue in the writings of the adherents of mechanistic determinism was full of contradictions. In *Jacques le fataliste*, just as in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, the arguments of each of the disputing sides, when logically completed, lead up to substantiation of the directly opposed point of view. Just as in the earlier novel the opponents change places and start arguing each one with himself.

Despite the fact that the term "fatalism" was used at that time by many philosophers, in practice what really lay behind it was an interpretation of events taking place in the world as an endless chain of causal links. Fatalism in the true sense of the word was not consciously taken up by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, because it would have stood in the way of their acknowledgement of the independent actions of men capable of changing circumstances (the ideologists of the French Revolution, who called for the overthrow of feudalism and the structuring of society on the basis of reasonable principles,

could not have argued in a different way). From the point of view of Holbach, for instance, acknowledgement of the necessity of all man's actions did not in any way prevent him from acting independently and did not free him of the obligation to personally oppose evil, injustice and so on. Diderot, who took the viewpoint of mechanistic determinism to its logical conclusion, demonstrated that it eventually leads to fatalism, i.e. to the virtual negation of Man's independence. But does not the validation of the inevitability of all that is happening signify that nothing is predetermined? Does fatalism not require freedom as its own negation and supplement? The difference between Diderot, on the one hand, and Holbach and many other philosophers on the other, lies in the fact that freedom is accepted as something existing side by side with necessity and not merely because it constitutes something like its opposite, but also because it at the same time is born of necessity.

As he develops all the "pros" and "cons" with regard to the thesis and antithesis in his fascinating, witty style, Diderot brings to the surface the contradictions of contemporary philosophical thought hidden deep beneath it. The main character in the novel, Jacques (whom Diderot presents as a pupil of Spinoza, deliberately accentuating in this way the role of necessity in his views) calls himself a fatalist and all the time he is trying to substantiate this view. He states that there is no denying that the events of our life "hold together neither more nor less than the links of a curb

bit"[1] none of which could be dropped without changing the whole; as a result, the Great Scroll of fate would need to be rewritten. That cannot be because a cause can only bring one effect in its wake, which in its turn is the cause of another phenomenon, and so on and so forth till infinity. The existing order of things cannot be changed, because there only exists one simple cause-and-effect relationship. The fact that man cannot find out a single word in the Scroll does not change anything in his behaviour: he is still powerless in the face of fate, because in the opposite case at least "one of the lines on the Great Scroll containing the truth and nothing but the truth would have to be false. It would be written on the Scroll: "'Jacques will break his neck on a particular day', and then Jacques would not break his neck? Can you conceive how that might be possible, whoever the author of the Great Scroll might be?"[2] It is from this standpoint that Jacques explains the events that befall him: if he had not had a gun-shot wound in the knee, he would not have fallen in love and everything was bound to have turned out the way it did.

The master seems to agree with Jacques' reasoning, but nevertheless he does not stop making fun of him and all the time he is bringing him round to the idea, towards which Jacques himself is already veering, namely that fatalism is something virtually sterile for man. In particular, when he is making fun of the

[1] Denis Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master*, Collier Books, N. Y., 1962, p. 29.

[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 6, p. 20.

fact that the horse Jacques was riding one fine day carried him to the gallows, he comments: "If it's written up yonder, you may do as you will, you will be nonetheless hanged, dear friend; and if it's not written up yonder, then the horse has lied. If that horse is not divinely inspired, then he's subject to crazy whims; you'll have to be careful."[1]

The paradox of fatalism, as Diderot was anxious to demonstrate, lies in the fact that acknowledgement of predetermination of everything that happens (Cf. "Everything that we see is necessary, or it cannot be other than it is"—Holbach, *Système de la Nature*, Part I, London, 1771, p. 55) enables man to behave in such a way as if there was no such thing as unavoidable fate at all. Here freedom begins to crystallize, firstly in the capacity of a negative addendum to necessity (fate appears not to exist, which is the same as saying that it does not exist), secondly as some sort of inexhaustibility of human actions (and in this sense something that has not been "programmed"). If everything which happens has to happen, then man, in his actions and thoughts, cannot be restricted by a single option. Freedom in this interpretation is identical with that which is multi-faceted, infinite and indefinite, and all this amounts to the reverse side of Fate itself.

Diderot does not of course go as far as defining freedom as a characteristic feature of man's own actions, but he does take a step in that direction: "It is just that, not knowing what is written up yonder, we know neither

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 67

what we want, nor what we do; so we follow our fancy which we call reason, or our reason, which is very often but dangerous fancy and which turns out sometimes well, sometimes badly".[1] But then perhaps reason and reasonable actions are included in the "Great Scroll" and Destiny weaves its patterns only on a basis of Reason? "Is it we who lead Destiny, or is it Destiny that leads us?"[2] Or are both predestined side by side as Jacques supposes?

The phrase "side by side", if we interpret it not merely as meaning the co-existence of external events, but rather as the interpenetration and the mutual determination of elements that are internally split, lifts up the curtain that had been veiling "paradoxality". Of course, if all the actions of man are predestined, then this is tantamount to the acknowledgement that any of these are possible; the one-sidedness of man's actions then is turned round to reveal they are many-faceted. Freedom too is revealed here in the form of a "chink" between the various possibilities, which seem to be rigidly laid down, but at the same time they are not anticipated. Fate or destiny in this way presupposes its own negation.

In Diderot's exposition various twists to the problem reveal more and more new paradoxes. For Holbach there was no contradiction in the fact that although man is compelled by necessity to act, he is always responsible for his actions; the acknowledgement of necessity, according to him, is precisely what presupposes

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 37.

morality. La Mettrie starts out from the opposite assertion, but also does not see a contradiction in the fact that, *being possessed of an innate moral instinct*, man is a creature who has been enlightened too much "to find himself guilty of thoughts and actions which are born and occur despite him; ... he does not let himself be eaten away by those executioners of remorse, *bitter fruit of education* which *the tree of Nature* never bore" (my italics—*T.D.*).[1]

La Mettrie did not realize that after having declared moral qualities innate, he could not regard them as the fruits of education.

Diderot sees the contradiction and therefore contrasts these two elements, bringing them up against each other in the argument between his characters as opposed, yet nevertheless mutually conditioning conclusions. On the one hand, being "programmed" in advance by Destiny, Man should not have to bear the responsibility for what he has done; consequently, there is no point in distinguishing between bad and good actions. For this reason the words "punishment" and "reward" for Jacques merely serve to frighten evil men and to encourage the good. (Admittedly it was still necessary to find out in advance where the criteria for distinguishing between Good and Evil lay.) Jacques was to ask: "How can it be otherwise ... if there is no freedom and if our destiny is written up yonder?" After all, "a man wended his way just as necessarily toward glory or ignominy, as a ball, being couscious of

[1] La Mettrie, *Œuvres philosophiques*, Vol. 1, Berlin, 1763, pp. 286-287.

its existence, would follow the slope of a mountain; and that, if the chain of causes and effects which form the life of a man right from the first instant of his birth up to his last sigh could be known to us, we would remain convinced that he had done only what it was necessary to do."[1]

On the other hand, the possibility of any action at all and an absence of knowledge of one's own destiny compels man to take an independent decision, as if there was no Destiny at all, to think about it and consequently to answer for his behaviour. That you could call freedom. "One is a fatalist, and yet at each moment one is thinking, talking, writing as if one was still proceeding from the premise of freedom," notes Diderot.[2] One way or another, in the arguments between Jacques and his master there is to be found a means of assessing one or another action of men as either both noble or base, good or evil, etc.

Hence, moral responsibility presupposes freedom as something extending beyond the framework of fatalism, and the fact that not only Jacques but also his master, referred to by Diderot himself as an "automaton" (just like the cynic Rameau), cannot deny freedom in its capacity as an inalienable characteristic of man's actions, indirectly testifies to its inevitability from the point of view of fatalism itself.

In this question, just as in relation to others

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[1] D. Diderot, *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master*, p. 175.

[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 2, Garnier Frères, Paris, 1875, p. 373.

discussed earlier, Diderot does not invent contradictions, but merely "opens our eyes" to them; thanks to him the thought of the Enlightenment becomes aware of its dialectical quality and reflects upon it. For this reason it is difficult to agree with Rosenkranz when he maintains that "when Diderot defended ... morality as opposed to immorality, the power of freedom as opposed to the coercion of determinism, the triumph of the true, the good and the beautiful as opposed to any kind of pessimism, he was contradicting Helvétius and Holbach, the whole standpoint of rationalism, which was considered to be philosophy."[1] Diderot himself was one of the representatives of that philosophy; but he had set himself apart from other philosophers in that he had made the mode of thought of those times, complete with its dialectical potential, the subject of examination.

Diderot was unusually ingenious with regard to the various twists of this issue, in which there came to light more and more new aspects of the contradiction and which eluded other philosophers. Holbach, for example, mentioned that acknowledgement of the necessity of everything that happens cannot stop man feeling sad or happy in appropriate circumstances, crying or laughing, becoming enthusiastic or indignant. He was to write: "Although I know that death is the fatal and necessary end of all beings, my soul is no less cut to the quick at the prospect of the death of a beloved spouse".[2] Unlike Holbach,

[1] K. Rosenkranz, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-13.
[2] Holbach, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

Diderot, in the guise of his hero Jacques, is all too well aware that being a fatalist, he ought "neither to laugh, nor cry, but to understand"; despite this in real life he cannot hold back from tears. He admits that, while as firm as a rock in important situations, he often finds himself despairing over the slightest of contradictions. In this connection he was to write: "According to such a system, one might imagine that Jacques neither rejoiced nor lamented about anything. That, however, was not the case. He behaved more or less as you or I would do. He thanked his benefactor so that he might continue to be good to him. He grew angry at the unjust man..."[1] If in such a case comments were made to the effect that he was like a dog biting the stone that had been thrown at it, he retorted: "The stone bitten by the dog does not mend its ways; the unjust man is changed by the stick".[2] His awareness of the disparity between his behaviour and his own system of views and his desire to be consistent led Jacques to the conclusion that there was no point in forcing himself to do anything: if Destiny had laid down everything then it had laid down that disparity as well. In that case he ought to remain himself and that would also be a way of submitting to Destiny, only a more comfortable and easy way (admittedly, as pointed out earlier, the thread of Destiny is being woven by man and woven in such a way as if there was no Destiny at all). Once it is assumed that in the provisions of Destiny

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 6, p. 284.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 284-285.

some events (at least those relating to man, and perhaps all events) operate in accordance with laws which are not predetermined, then Destiny itself incorporates into its plan some kind of uncertainty. Not going as far as a positive definition of Freedom, Diderot nevertheless, thanks to his understanding of it from a negative angle, can sketch in the framework of mechanistic determinism.

The "strangeness" of fatalism is brought out still more graphically by Diderot when he turns to the question of chance. If it is correct to regard all that exists as necessary, then chance is also necessary; conversely, the acknowledgement of merely one chance would mean that it too is an accident, i.e. would have introduced the idea of necessity. Subtle irony helps Diderot to invent situations in which it is easy to see the senselessness of fatalism. When he describes, for instance, Jacques' quarrel with the innkeeper's wife, he jokingly (and yet at the time with serious intent) remarks that Jacques could not continue because the innkeeper's wife "appears with two bottles of champagne, one in each hand, and that it was written on high that any speaker who might address himself to Jacques with such an introduction must be heard".[1] Jacques' rancour could never withstand a bottle of good wine and a comely woman: "That was written on high, about you, dear reader, about me and about plenty of others",[2] remarked Diderot by way of con-

[1] Denis Diderot, *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*, G. Charpentier et Cie, Paris, n.d, p. 144.
[2] *Ibidem.*

clusion. His ironic appeals to the reader to choose from the many possible situations precisely that which is necessary and which cannot be replaced by any other, are aimed directly against Holbach's one-sided fatalistic conclusion. If, according to Holbach, "In the terrible convulsions that shake our political societies on occasions and often bring in their wake the downfall of an empire, there is not a single action, a single word, a single thought, a single will, or a single passion in the people who are involved in a revolution—whether as those who destroy or as victims—which is not necessary, which does not bring about the necessary result..."[1]—and this, from Holbach's point of view, applies not only to revolutions, but definitely to all that takes place—then in Diderot's opinion the itinerant Jacques and his master might have a bad supper, or, after giving themselves up to gluttony, spend the night with an old friend, or with impoverished monks and so on and so forth—all these avenues appeared to him as "equally possible".

It is moreover no coincidence that Diderot kept on interrupting the main thread of the story, introducing into it events of a kind that appear to bear no relation to the novel, if it were not for the fact that they were illustrating features of the mode of thought that was Diderot's central concern; various characters who are pure inventions, for example, the poet from Pondicherry, appear on the scene only once. There also appear hearses, a horse carries Jacques to the gallows—

[1] Holbach, op. cit., p. 44.

everywhere the reader is seemingly given cause to expect the continuation of the story, but it does not come and in this way the fact that things can happen by accident, is borne out.

By introducing chance elements and using them to describe the protagonists, Diderot calls into question the then dominant idea to the effect that any man can be, to use the modern term, "calculated", i.e. it can be predicted with complete accuracy (since the cause-and-effect relationship is straightforward) what he will do subsequently. The examples provided in the novel testify to precisely the opposite: one and the same man can perpetrate both a moral and an immoral act in relation to various people (and sometimes to one and the same person), as a result of which his behaviour cannot be predicted (let us remember how unexpected was the behaviour of one of the characters in *Jacques le fataliste*, namely le marquis des Arcis), and this is determined by the fact that man, as pointed out earlier, is constantly being moulded in argument, in dialogues with himself.

As we can see, the issue of necessity versus freedom was raised by Diderot in a very unusual way: he realized that each of these extremes contained within itself the other in a concealed form. The concealed elements are revealed, strange as it may seem, through mutual negation, arguments, and dialogue. This paradox was seen by Diderot as a logical enigma.

3. *Matter and Motion*

So far the philosophical ideas of Diderot have been examined for the purpose of elucidating one of their logical features, namely the paradox. It is no coincidence that the content of this concept has been illustrated in the analysis of literary works, for the organic link between Diderot's philosophical thought and his artistic thought produced a "hero" which can be described as the way of thinking peculiar to his age.

Unlike other thinkers of the Enlightenment who shared his principles Diderot was able, thanks to the fact that he was passing ideas based on natural sciences through the "magic crystal" of the paradox, to approach the limits of mechanistic natural science, which came to light in the form of an unusual logical alternative, enigma and an insurmountable difficulty. In view of this, natural science appeared for him not as a system of answers, but rather as a system of questions.

All the most important philosophical works by Diderot, which should be seen to include *Pensées sur l'interpretation de la Nature* (Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature—1754), *Principes philosophiques sur la matière et le mouvement* (Philosophical Principles Regarding Matter and Motion—1770), the trilogy *Entretien entre D'Alembert et Diderot, Le Rêve de D'Alembert* and *Suite de l'entretien* (A Conversation between d'Alembert and Diderot, D'Alembert's Dream, and Sequel to the Conversation—1769) are filled with questions over

which Diderot was tirelessly wracking his brains.

It would of course be quite wrong to forget that Diderot was, in the full sense of the word, a representative of mechanistic determinism, like Holbach, Helvétius, La Mettrie and many others. They all reasoned within one and the same logical framework. Yet precisely thanks to his dialectical approach he was able to see its "blind alleys", and without raising the question as to the usefulness of a new logic, he nevertheless demonstrated the limitations of the former one. This ambivalent position on the dividing line between two systems of logic stems from the use made by him of the specific forms for the presentation of material: these are hypotheses, assumptions, even dreams, but the form that acquires particular importance now is that of the question. Herbert Dieckmann insists that they all depend on Diderot's unusual mode of thought; Dieckmann considers Diderot one of the few writers of the Enlightenment, who grasped that the rational thought associated with mathematical natural science and the philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had its limitations and succeeded in illustrating this point by using a mode of presentation and problem-solving that was not typical for the philosophy of those times.[1] For this reason, when analysing his philosophical works it is important to turn our attention not only to what Diderot is demonstrat-

[1] H. Dieckmann, *Die Künstlerische Form des Rève de D'Alembert,* Westdeutsche Verlag, Köln-Opladan, 1966.

ing but also to the way in which it is expressed, and to the arguments and counter-arguments used to present his polemics within the school of mechanistic determinism.

Mechanistic determinism, which took shape in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at the same time as the development of so-called positive science and as its reflexion, revealed its own dependence, first and foremost, on the advance of mechanics. In the works of the best known representatives of that sphere of learning, matter was identified with substance while motion was seen mainly as transference. It has already been pointed out that the scientific demand for unambiguous truth required that the results of philosophical analysis exclude any possibility of conflicting interpretations. Nevertheless a contradiction was rooted even in the basic definitions of matter and motion. Demonstrating that meant providing a concrete investigation of those questions which at the time were at the forefront of attention.

The materialism of the eighteenth century was described by Marx and Engels as metaphysical: it was a system of views on Nature as a material substance with its own motion which was made up of associations and dissociations of minute material particles. Holbach wrote for instance that "Nature, in its broadest sense, is the grans whole which is produced as a result of combination of different substances arranged in various ways and from the different forms of motion observed by us in the Universe".[1] For the Encyclopa-

[1] Holbach, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

edists negation of the existence of God was a reliable argument confirming the principle of the self motion of matter. Holbach observed: "...motion is a mode of existence (façon d'être), which stems of necessity from the essence of matter".[1] La Mettrie was of a similar opinion, with the proviso that motion should not be deduced from the dimensionality of matter: "If there is an active principle, it must possess in the unknown essence of matter a source other than dimensionality".[2] He also maintained that there is "an intrinsic force of motion within the substance of bodies, because after all it is impossible to demonstrate or to conceive of any other substance that acts upon it".[3] Possessing an active character of its own Nature exists for ever, but motion is only interpreted as the transference of either large masses or the tiniest of particles. In this connection Holbach noted: "In general our senses reveal to us two sorts of motion within the bodies around us: one is the motion of mass thanks to which a body is transferred from one place to another.... The other is internal and concealed motion which depends upon the essence, the combination, the action and counteraction of imperceptible molecules constituting the body".[4] It is only possible to speak of the combination or separation of already existing particles of matter, and therefore within Nature there is no place

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[2] La Mettrie, *Textes choisis*, Editions sociales, Paris, 1954, p. 68.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[4] Holbach, *Système de la Nature*, p. 12.

for emergences or disappearances. In this connection Holbach dwelt on several occasions on statements made by Empédocles and other philosophers to the effect that there is neither birth nor death for any mortal, but that there exist only the combination and separation of that which has been combined, and it is this that people call birth and death. Nature appears as a colossal circulation, in which nothing emerges for the first time, but in which everything is merely being repeated. There is nothing surprising about this: after all, within the framework of metaphysical materialism there is no contradiction, and consequently there is no development or emergence of a new quality. Indeed, although Holbach appears to recognise the existence of motion intrinsic to bodies, in the final analysis he inclines towards the view that "strictly speaking, there is no spontaneous motion in various bodies in Nature, given that they continually act one upon another and that all their changes stem from the causes, either visible or concealed, that move them."[1]

It appears that the reasoning of Holbach, Helvétius, La Mettrie and many other French materialists was completely free of contradictions and that the conclusions they brought forward—regarding the qualitative uniformity of matter and motion as transference—were the only ones which each of them could accept. This was, however, not entirely the case. The point is that the attempt to explain, for example, motion as transference leads to

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the acceptance of motion intrinsic to bodies. In other words, the contradictory nature of such a concept of motion immediately comes to light (and the same also applies to the concept of matter). The contradiction objectively consists in the following: if we proceed from the assumption that motion is only causally determined and that all processes taking place within the Universe consist in the transference of bodies from one place to another, then this would be possible only given the homogeneity of matter (otherwise if a body possesses a qualitative essence all of its own then it would also have its own capacity for motion and would not require any external force), but if all matter is only homogenous, then the principle to the effect that one body acts upon another is called into question due to the impossibility of drawing a clear dividing line between various bodies, since the assumption that such a dividing line exists already constitutes a qualitative distinction. Causal action itself therefore presupposes some kind of heterogeneity of matter in addition to its homogeneity.

In its turn, the absolutization of inner motion would imply that every body, when causing its own motion (transference in the mechanistic interpretation) would be the cause of its own effect and therefore it would be appropriate to speak of matter as homogenous. In this way the contradictions in the interpretation of motion reemerge as contradictions in the concept of matter.

In one way or another these paradoxes come to light in the philosophical writings

of that period, in particular in the form of searches for the heterogenous within the homogenous itself: Holbach, for instance, assumes that "it is wrong to believe that matter is a homogenous body... the differrence of location alone must inevitably involve a more or less perceptible diversity not only in the modifications, but also in the essence, the properties and in the whole system of bodies and substances".[1] The contradictions in the interpretation of matter and motion do not, however, attract Holbach's attention: he moves on past them, while Diderot by virtue of the special features of his thought, initially notes the inconsistency between the mode of reasoning used by the French materialists and their conclusions (matter is one and the same, i.e. homogeneous, and motion is transference, whereas, during demonstration of this the opposite is also revealed). Then he raises the question as to the contradictions found in the concepts of matter, motion etc., thereby to a certain extent going beyond the framework of metaphysical materialism.

For Diderot matter was not simply uniform; assuming it to be heterogeneous he criticised the philosophers who denied this on account of the fact that they acknowledge only one single force: in reality everything is "destroying itself under one form, recomposing itself under another; [I see] sublimations, dissolutions, combinations of all kinds, phenomena incompatible with the homogeneity of matter; and therefore I conclude that matter is heteroge-

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

nous, that an infinity of diverse elements exists in nature, that each of these elements, by its diversity, has its own particular force, innate, immutable, eternal, indestructible; and that these forces contained in the body have their actions outside the body; whence comes the motion, or rather the general fermentation of the universe."[1]

In the above extract mechanistic transference is deemed to be dependent on an inner force, and this interpretation to some extent goes beyond the framework of the conception of motion generally accepted at that time. Diderot's words to the effect that "the transference of body from one place to another is not motion, but only action" were to be referred to by D'Alembert as a new method of looking at things. It is with ample justification that he refers to this as new, since here Diderot tears asunder the thread of metaphysical reasoning, asserting that not only matter as a whole but every part of it, every molecule is capable of motion. In one of his important philosophical works *Principes philosophiques sur la matière et le mouvement* (Philosophical Principles Regarding Matter and Movement—1770) Diderot wrote: "A body, according to some philosophers, is, in itself, without action and without force...", but "...a body in itself, by the nature of its essential qualities, is full of action and of energy, whether one considers it molecule by ... molecule or whether one considers it in the mass.... Everything in nature has its own

[1] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 131.

different form of action, like this mass of molecules which you call fire."[1]

When criticising those who consider that in order to conceptualize motion, it is necessary outside existing matter (here it is the individual particle which is under consideration) to imagine the force which acts on it, Diderot notes: a molecule, endowed with an intrinsic property, is in itself an active force, it acts on another molecule which in its turn acts on the first.

In order to set matter in motion, some writers maintain action, i.e. force, is necessary: this is true, replies Diderot, only it can exist either as a force that is external in relation to the molecule or as an "inherent, essential force within the molecule, constituting its nature" (it could not be otherwise insofar as matter is both homogenous and heterogenous). "Regardless of its nature (the molecule's nature—*T.D.*) force ensues from it, having an effect outside it and other molecules also have an effect on it. The force which acts on the molecule dries up; the force within the molecule does not dry up. It is immutable, eternal". This means that motion within the molecule is primary and is different from the movement caused by external forces, although the two are linked.

Recognition of the heterogenous nature of matter confronted Diderot with the task of reinterpreting the concept of integrity which had already taken shape. Even at the time when Holbach had attributed immanent movement

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

to the world Universum, whereas individual bodies, in his opinion, were set in motion by an external cause, there arose the threat that logical link between the whole and its parts might be broken. This threat did not materialize because within the framework of mechanistic determinism the motion of matter was interpreted as a cause-and-effect interaction, thanks to which forms of movement of the whole and the parts coincided: while constantly changing their location, bodies were returning into their original place. The Universum was also immutable and these conceptions corresponded to the mechanistic picture of the world.

Within this conception was also contained in a concealed form the possibility of the interpretation of inner motion as something that could not be reduced to transference: it needed to characterize the existence of the whole and its parts in different terms. In this case the whole needed to constitute not simply the totality of the parts, but to consist of elements that somehow penetrate one another and are organized in a special way, since only then could it be possible to explain the mutual conditioning of the heterogenous and the homogeneous aspects of the existence of matter.

The whole, which is considered non-mechanistically and in which this inter-relationship comes into its own, meant for Diderot a unity of elements, represented in the form of molecules, possessing inner force and special properties. It is indeed molecules that are the simplest indivisible elements of heterogeneity

and in his appreciation of this fact Diderot differs from Holbach, in whose opinion man can have no notion of these units, since the smallest units can be the basis of quantitative (though not qualitative) division. For Holbach quantitative division was not associated with qualitative distinction, while the molecule for Diderot was a "materialised" monad in which all the world is represented as a single whole, otherwise heterogeneity could not re-emerge as homogeneity. The world was seen not like the sum of identical parts, but like a unity, an internal interpenetration of heterogenous units, and as an image of this "heterogenous homogeneity" Diderot took a "cluster of bees". Where for D'Alembert there is only "contiguity" (mechanistic association), for Diderot there exists "continuity" (within discontinuity). According to his definition the world, or the whole mass of matter, is a "hive". Have you seen how bees form a single cluster stuck together by their feet? Would you like to turn that cluster into a single animal?— Diderot asks his listener. To this end all that is necessary is to cut off the feet with which the bees are holding on to one another and the contiguity will give way to continuity: the difference between the second state of the cluster and the first lies in the fact that "now it is a whole, a single animal, while before it was only a collection of animals".[1] This is how any living organism needs to be approached, whose separate organs can be compared to the individual bees in the

[1] Diderot, *Œuvres philosophiques,* Editions Garnier Frères, Paris, 1961, p. 293.

cluster, "between whom the law of continuity upholds a common unity, sympathy and identity"[1].

The application of an essentially dialectical method for examining matter and motion allowed Diderot to chart the limits of mechanistic natural science in his time. First and foremost it was a question of the disparity between the interpretation of matter as a unity of opposites with an explanation, then accepted in natural science, about how a new object or phenomenon comes into being. The only possible way in the light of generally accepted notions, is the gradual addition of one molecule to another, as a result of which all sorts of objects of nature come into being.

Diderot also appeared not to doubt that "to one living point is added another, then another; as a result of these consecutive applications there appears a single whole".[2] He went on to add: "As a drop of mercury coalesces with another drop of mercury, so a sensitive, living molecule coalesces with a sensitive, living molecule... Initially there were two drops, but after the contact there is only one."[3]

Nevertheless it still remains outside his comprehension how the transformation takes place from the external to the internal, and why the whole that has taken shape as a result of this transformation possesses properties which are not present in the individual

[1] *Ibidem.*
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 288.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 289.

molecules that have come together as one.

The questions which Diderot raised in one of his early philosophical works, *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la Nature* (Thoughts on the Interpretation of Nature—1754), and to which he kept on adding new ones remained unanswered, because the answer to them could not be provided in the framework of mechanistic science. The very formulation of these questions, however, went beyond the limits of mechanistic science: questions are the specific form through which Diderot lent meaning to the limitations of the scientific thought of the period. These questions concern problems connected with the transition from inanimate matter to animate matter, from sensitive matter to reflective matter (in other words, he is concerned with qualitative transformations, without which it is impossible to understand the principle of heterogeneity) and they take shape as conjectures (mysteries for mechanistic science?) or hypotheses.

While it is still possible to make do with a mechanistic explanation for the coalescence of two inanimate molecules, in those cases when it is a question of life (although it would seem admissible to discuss that on the basis of an analogy with the first), Diderot could hardly regard the following answer as adequate: "...contact between two living molecules is quite different from the contiguity of two inert masses" and declare that "the difference between the contact of two sensitive molecules and the contact of two molecules that are not sensitive" consists in "an ordinary action and reaction", although of a "particular char-

acter".[1] In connection with this there arises a whole range of conjectures and questions: "In geometry a real quantity combined with an imaginary quantity provides an imaginary total; in nature if a molecule of living matter combines with a molecule of dead matter, will the whole be alive or dead?... If the aggregate can be either living or dead, when and why will it be living? When and why will it be dead?... Can living matter be combined with living matter? How does that combination take place? What does it result in? I ask the same questions with relation to dead matter."[2]

Diderot wrote when examining the development of the egg that he observed how in that development and in "certain other processes of nature, matter that is inert in appearance, but organized, passes, thanks to purely physical agents, from the state of inertia to the state of sensitivity and life, but the link necessary for this transition escapes me".[3]

The hypothesis concerning the universal sensitivity of matter, with the help of which Diderot was trying to grope after a way out of the *cul de sac* that had thus been revealed, also constitutes a question rather than an answer. Diderot points out that it is necessary to acknowledge that "the organization or co-ordination of inert parts does not by any means lead to sensitivity, and the general sensitivity of the molecules of matter is only an assumption which derives all its strength from the fact that it frees us from certain difficulties.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 290.
[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 2, pp. 220-221.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 301.

But this is not enough to make it a good philosophy".[1] Lenin rated this hypothesis highly for its materialist orientation and in connection with this he described Diderot as a philosopher "who came very close to the standpoint of contemporary materialism", and who "notes the similarity of the premises of idealist Berkeley and the sensationalist Condillac".[2] He also turned attention to the fact that of these two possibilites—admitting the existence of a "concealed element" within which was contained the living in embryonic form, or assuming the presence within matter of a general capacity for sensation, Diderot chose the second, probably because that gave him more scope for explaining qualitative transitions in the development of that very capacity from inert sensitivity to living sensitivity.

4. *Problems of the Theory of Cognition*

Considerable space in Diderot's works is devoted to questions concerning the theory of knowledge. He starts out by reflecting upon them at the very beginning of his philosophical career, when as a yet unknown man of letters he spent much time in arguments on these matters with Condillac and Rousseau, and right up until the very end of his days. In this sphere he also succeeds in identifying contradictions inherent in the views of the

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 302.

[2] V. I. Lenin, "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism", *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968, Vol. 14, p. 35.

thinkers of the Enlightenment, and focusses his attention upon them.

How does man acquire knowledge of the surrounding world? Locke and Berkeley, Spinoza and Hume and many other philosophers have tried to provide answers to this question. Following in the footsteps of the materialists, Diderot points out that the linking and sequence of ideas is the same as the linking and sequence of objects. Man starts out, undoubtedly, from sensations; observation, contemplation and experience—such is the path to Truth. Moreover, experience is understood by Diderot, as indeed by many other French thinkers of the Enlightenment, as a testing ground for checking out thoughts arrived at on a basis of evidence provided by our sense organs. Commencing with his *Lettre sur les aveugles a l'usage de ceux qui voient* (Letter on the Blind, for the Use of Those Who See—1749) he tries to understand the inter-relationships between the various senses. Probably in the course of the conversations they had together similar thoughts occurred to both Diderot and Condillac: both maintained that each sense organ was completely independent with regard to the others, but although they were all connected but the role of the connecting link belonged not to any one of them but to reason. In this *Lettre...* Diderot disagrees with Locke on the question as to how visual perception occurs. Mention was made of the fact that as a result of operations carried out at that time by the surgeons R. A. Réaumur and William Cheselden on certain patients who had been born blind and

others who had lost their sight the capacity to see had been restored. Did it then mean that tactile perception inevitably had to be involved or did the capacity for sight evolve independently? From Locke's point of view it was indispensable that tactile sensation would combine with sight, for without its involvement man would not, for instance, be able to distinguish a cube from a sphere. Diderot's point of view, on the other hand, was rather different. In his opinion, we are undoubtedly rendered tremendous services from the cooperation of our feelings, but it would undoubtedly be better if we used each one separately and did not resort to the help of two when one was enough. To cite Diderot's own words, adding touch to sight when it was enough just to use one's eyes, was tantamount to harnessing to two already frisky horses a third who was pulling in a different direction. "I think that when for the first time the eyes of someone born blind open to the light he perceives nothing at all; his eyes need some time to accumulate experience, but they will accumulate experience all by themselves and without the help of touch. They will learn not only to distinguish colours but also to identify the rough outlines of objects."[1] With the advantage of hindsight it should be pointed out that Diderot was in part right, since recent psychological research has shown that if hands are involved in the process of the formation of a visual image, it is not in the capacity of organs of touch, as Locke assumed, but as

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 1, p. 355.

organs of action, and this difference is one of fundamental importance. (See the works of French and Soviet psychologists on the question: Jean Piaget, *Izbranniye psikhologicheskiye trudy*—Selected Psychological Writings, Moscow, 1969, and the collection of articles *Vospriyatiye i deistviye*—Perception and Action, ed. by A. V. Zaporozhets, Moscow, 1967, etc.).

Diderot, who was looking for the basis of cognition, could not attribute to any one sense organ the decisive role.

So, according to Diderot, man obtains his various perceptions through sensations, and it is on this basis that his impressions take shape. The difficulty lies in the question as to how on this basis it might be possible to explain the way in which judgements and concepts take shape. After all, in order to form a judgement it is necessary to compare, to juxtapose, and consequently it is necessary for there to be a number of conceptions in man's mind at the same time. As Diderot sees it, however, man in reality perceives one thing at a time. Diderot finds a solution to the problem by recognizing memory as one of the essential features of the mind. Thanks to memory we retain within ourselves former, no longer immediate impressions and are capable of comparing them with new ones we have just received. In *Entretien entre D'Alembert et Diderot* (A Conversation between D'Alembert and Diderot) Diderot writes in this connection as follows: "...If a being that can feel, and that possesses this organization that gives rise to memory, con-

nects up the impressions it receives, forms through this connection a story which is that of its life, and so acquires consciousness of its identity, it can then deny, affirm, conclude and think."[1] Here it occurs to Diderot to compare man with a musical instrument possessing sensitivity and memory, an instrument that can repeat tunes played on it previously by Nature.

Concepts that are not rooted in Nature can be compared to those forests of the North where the trees have no roots: a small gust of wind is enough to bring down such a forest. In the same way a seemingly insignificant fact can be enough to bring down a whole forest of conceptions. The task before the scholar and philosopher is to make the transition from observation to reasoning, from collecting facts to linking them together. In this context reason always appears as something secondary as compared to sensations: as Diderot sees it, we do not deduce syllogisms, for they have all been deduced already by Nature. We only register phenomena which we know about from our experience, phenomena between which there exists a natural link.

Nevertheless Diderot would not have been a thinker of the Enlightenment if he had not acknowledged at the same time that reason plays the decisive role. This sounds like a paradox, and it was indeed the paradox of the century.

Objecting to Helvétius' contention to the

[1] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 55.

effect that "to make a judgement is to feel",[1] Diderot observes that when presented in this form this particular judgement does not appear to him to be correct. After all "the mind, overwhelmed by this infinite series of the faintest possible causes and the weakest possible effects, rejects this supposition (in this particular case, that concerning the infinite transferences of molecules—*T. D.*) and certain others of a similar variety, only because of the prejudice to the effect that nothing takes place beyond the reach of our senses and that everything ceases at the point where we no longer see; but one of the main differences between an observer of Nature, on the one hand, and an interpreter of Nature on the other, lies in the fact that the latter proceeds from the point at which the sensations and the instruments abandon the former; he conjectures on the basis of what is and what still ought to be... if he took but one more step then he would go beyond the confines of Nature".[2] After all, even though the assumption with regard to the universal sensitivity of matter is only a guess, not yet supported by any observations or experiments, how could the natural scientist or the philosopher do without it? Although it may appear as if guesses, hypotheses, assumptions are built up entirely on a basis of facts, at some stage there is a gap between them and Reason, otherwise they would

[1] Helvêtius, *De l'Homme de ses facultès intellectuelles et de son éducation,* Vol. 2, A. Londres, Chez la Société Typographique, m. DCC. LXXIII, p. 35.

[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 2, p. 209.

not be hypotheses but strict proofs.

Diderot seemed to share wholeheartedly Helvétius' conviction that "it is necessary to move forward in the wake of experience and never to anticipate it", but at the same time he was worried by questions such as: "Does one gain experience by chance? Is not experience often preceded by some sort of assumption, analogy, some sort of theoretical idea, which experience will either confirm or destroy?"[1] He is wondering whether Reason is not preceded in such cases by observations, sensations.

Finally Diderot draws the conclusion that our reason governs all our feelings. It appears that Reason influences our feelings, regulates them, and that hypotheses do not stem directly from sensations, that they are consequently dissociated from sensation, thus revealing the independence of Reason. Therefore sensations are primary and reason is secondary; also, reason is what comes first and sensations are what comes second. That is precisely the contradiction which in Diderot's aesthetics will be reshaped as the antinomy of the imitation of Nature viz., artistic invention. Pinpointing this contradiction is precisely what is involved in singling out the "difficulty" faced by Reason.

For Diderot the questions for which he was seeking answers remained "eternal enigmas", but even in this respect he was to appear in an advantageous light compared to many other thinkers, who did not even come across similar

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 2, p. 349.

difficulties. To La Mettrie, for example, it seemed quite correct to consider that although Man was different from animals, "the imbecile and the fool are animals with human faces, as the intelligent ape is a little man in an another shape".[1] For La Mettrie there was nothing complicated about defining Man as a machine, endowing him with a brain and feelings, without troubling himself in particular with the question as to the essence of the latter. "To be a machine, to feel, to think, to know how to distinguish good from bad, as well as blue from yellow, in a word, to be born with an intelligence and a sure moral instinct, and to be but an animal," writes La Mettrie, "are therefore characters which are no more contradictory, than to be an ape or a parrot and to be able to give oneself pleasure."[2] Diderot would not accept such a "simple" solution: once matter is presented as possessed of sensitivity, it is necessary of course to assume that marble also feels; however, if, as a result of that, the difference between a marble statue and a human body is only a question of organization, then at the same time it is essential to establish whether too much is implied in those words for it to be acknowledged that these forms are homogenous, or too little for them to be assigned to two different realms of Nature. When Diderot develops evolutionary ideas and paints a picture of the development of the living organism and the transformation of one spe-

[1] La Mettrie, *Textes choisis*, Editions sociales, Paris, 1974, p. 187.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

cies into another, starting out from the fact that there exists only one substance, within the homogenous matter, however, he distinguishes heterogenous units; consequently, he characterizes evolution as a process of development. He is convinced of the fallacy of preformationism, according to which, among other things, man was always man and only increased in size in proportion to his age "while nothing was more mistaken than that point of view" and in the beginning man "was nothing" before later being transformed into an "imperceptible dot, formed from the tiniest of molecules scattered in the blood and lymph of the father and mother"[1] and only later assuming the form to be revealed at the moment of birth.

Not only does each individual creature differ fundamentally from all others, but each species constitutes a new quality that has taken shape in the course of lengthy changes. Long before Darwin Diderot expressed evolutionary ideas, based for the most part on the hypotheses he was to formulate in 1754: "If creatures gradually change, passing through barely perceptible changes, then Time, which does not stop, is bound eventually to establish an enormous difference between forms which existed in times long past, those existing today and those which will exist in future centuries..."[2] Diderot went on to conclude that what we now accept as the history of Nature is no more than

[1] Diderot, *Entretien entre D'Alembert et Diderot. Le Rêve de D'Alembert, Suite de l'entretien*, p. 103.
[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 2, p. 215.

the very incomplete story of one moment.

In his book about Diderot I. K. Luppol was full of praise for these ideas: "Of course we do not assert that he charted the path which Lamarck and Darwin were later to traverse. The paths of these scholars were very different, and all that brought them together was the idea of transformationism. Yet it is our opinion that present in Diderot's *Weltanschauung* are elements of Lamarckism and, what is even more fascinating, Darwinism too."[1]

Yet Diderot considered that the underlying causes of the process of transition remained unclear, "especially in the hypothesis of those who only admit a single substance and who explain the formation of man, or animals in general, *by a series of contacts between several sensitive particles*" (my italics—*T. D.*).[2] All Diderot's difficulty lay in needing to decide whether it is possible (and if so, how) to link the process of the formation of a new species (or that of each individual creature) with the gradual addition of many (homogenous) particles to an existing base. Since he found no other way to enable him to fathom all the differences, he opted for the concept of evolution as an unending circulation of matter, in which heterogeneity is "removed" till the point when the last vestige of any kind of individuality is lost. In this connection he was to write: "There is nothing precise in nature... Everything is more or less one thing

[1] I. K. Luppol, *Denis Diderot,* Moscow, 1960 (in Russian).

[2] Diderot, *Œuvres philosophiques, op. cit.*, p. 306.

or another, more or less earth, more or less air, more or less fire; everything belongs to one kingdom or another... therefore nothing is of the essence of a particular being... No, surely, since there is no quality of which no being has a share... And you talk of individuals, poor philosophers!... Then what do you mean by your individuals? There aren't any... There is only one great individual, that is the whole. In that whole, as in a machine or some animal, you may give a certain name to a certain part, but if you call this part of the whole an individual you are making as great a mistake as if you called the wing of a bird, or a feather on that wing, an individual."[1]

For Diderot this problem remains unsolved: the questions as to how a new type of matter is formed, and what it represents in its capacity as a distinctive whole, are not exhausted. How is it possible that matter is not one—either alive or dead? (Substance is one—sensitive matter, but how do its fundamentally different forms take shape?) "Are moulds principles of forms? What is a mould? Is it something real that has prior existence, or only the comprehensible limits of the energy of a living molecule united with dead or living matter, limits determined by the relationship between any energy and any resistance? If it is a real being that goes before, how is it formed?"[2] (If it is not clear what the actual process of transformation into something else signifies, because matter is represented as homogenous,

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 312.
[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 2, p. 220.

then possibly there exist predetermined forms, but the problem lies in the fact that it is necessary to explain from the point of view of the heterogeneity of matter how they came into being).

Matter, engendering its infinite variety, and matter doomed to turn round and round in the same spiral of being; movement as the repetition of what has gone before and movement seen as the appearance of something different; evolution as a process of the creation of new species and evolution as a chain of gradual transitions which cannot be interrupted; the whole taking shape as the result of the external joining together of identical molecules and the whole as something that cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts—these are the dilemmas which Diderot perceived as paradoxes.

When summing up the philosophical ideas of Diderot it is as well to say once again that he was a representative of the philosophy of the Enlightenment—of French materialism—in every sense of the word. However, insofar as his thought had specific features all of its own, on which attention was focussed earlier, he succeeded in finding contradictions in the concepts of matter, motion, necessity, the whole, etc., which for him personally remained unresolved, but thanks to which he was able to a certain extent to probe beyond the inward-looking and metaphysical nature of this materialism, having raised problems which could not be solved within the framework of that materialism. The special feature of the method of reasoning used by Diderot was

described earlier in this book as "paradoxality" (Diderot himself referred to it as the "paradox method") which—partly spontaneously as a result of his unusual talent and rare combination of artistic and philosophical thought, and partly deliberately—found expression in his endeavour to search for the contradiction in his subject, or to examine a subject from two opposite points of view.

As a consequence of the fact that methods of mechanistic natural science were transposed to the philosophy of the eighteenth century, to use Engels' phrase, its theoreticians recognized as logical and correct the reasoning which excluded contradiction by selecting one of two opposed possibilities. It seems that in this instance there is no place for contradiction: however, contradictions existed here nevertheless, but in a special negative form, in the form of a ban on contradictions, or their impossibility. In other words, an opposite opinion can be found each time, but outside the given framework. The paradoxality of this reasoning lies in the fact that, as mentioned earlier, having exhausted the arguments in support of some idea or other, we unexpectedly come up against an assertion directly opposed to that which has just been demonstrated.

Diderot's achievement lies in the fact that he found in the logic of his times contradictions and demonstrated that the "either—or" principle, held by the materialists to be the only correct one, at the same time reveals its content to be a reflection of the "and—and" principle. For him it becomes clear that the

opposite exists not outside the given framework, but on its edge, i. e. at its own extreme point. As a result of this he was able to understand that the thinking of natural scientists was different from that of philosophers: the natural scientist always demands a simple conclusion, while the philosopher understands that simple conclusions are illusory, that within anything that appears non-contradictory there lies hidden paradoxality. When the selection of one of these two opposed possibilities has been made and the process has faded out in the result, it appears that there cannot be any contradiction at all and that knowledge is something that is built up in a strictly unambivalent way. Diderot begins to understand that this is not so, and that it is impossible to do away with contradictions.

All the above gives us reason to maintain that in these paradoxes Diderot succeeds in revealing the mystery behind the mechanistic school of French materialism of the eighteenth century. As we see it, his writing brings to light the antinomy—a form of contradiction so typical of the thought of the whole of that period.

For Kant antinomies testified to the fact that human reason extends beyond the limits laid down for it. For Diderot a paradox begins when the demonstration of a thesis reaches its logical limits and consequently comes up against that which lies beyond them—the opposite. Just as for Kant so at the basis of most of Diderot's paradoxes, there lies the contradiction between absolute necessity and absolute coincidence, between necessity and

freedom. Just as in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, once again contradiction is revealed to our gaze, when we extrapolate what is grasped and known to what is infinite and unknown. One "small" reservation should be made, however: Kant speaks here of what cannot be known, but Diderot, on the other hand, speaks of what has not been made known (the unknown, the unauthentic, but which exists and reveals itself to us thanks to a perfectly acceptable hypothesis).

Since the paradox constituted an as yet untried form of antinomy, that still had to be developed, the logic pursued by Diderot is different from that pursued by Kant: Diderot stresses that the proof of a thesis always and inevitably brings in its wake the antithesis, while Kant builds up the actual proof of the thesis on the basis of the antithesis. Diderot arrives at an idea opposite from that which was his starting point, while Kant starts out from the opposite. Consequently Kant completes what Diderot began.

Often "paradoxality" takes Diderot "unawares", obliging him to ponder upon the complexity of life and the impossibility of reducing it to some rigid principle. Precisely because a paradox, if examined logically, constitutes an undeveloped form, in which a thought is represented in the course of its vital development, in incomplete form, it is possible in it to light upon seeds not only of antinomic thinking, but also seeds of subsequent logical techniques.

This allows us to focus attention on yet another common trend of philosophical de-

velopment from Diderot to Kant, from the French Enlightenment to classical German philosophy.

5. *Man as Natural Creature*

As mentioned earlier, the concept of "natural man" provided the basis for the projects devised by the thinkers of the Enlightenment for the reshaping of society. In the eighteenth century this concept implied an atomized individual, existing outside society, but nevertheless endowed with all human attributes. The "robinsonade" theory, i.e. the idea of an isolated individual living like Robinson Crusoe totally independently of all other people, was supplemented at that time by theories of a social contract, for in the eyes of the Enlightenment thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (not only in France but also in Britain), although each individual is perfectly capable of getting along without anyone else, in the course of time he begins to understand the advantages of a shared existence and comes together with other people as a result of a deliberate contract. In accordance with this he takes it upon himself to place social interests above personal ones and voluntarily to renounce those claims which are detrimental to those around him.

All seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers who made any kind of name for themselves upheld these ideas, and when criticizing them fifty years later Marx tried above all to understand the basis on which they had grown up. The error in assertions of this

kind, in Marx' opinion, was that they started out from the single individual, when in reality man only exists and develops, right from the start, within human society. He made it clear that the formation of the individual outside society is just as impossible as would be the development of language skills if the individual were not living alongside other people and participating in conversations with them. The actual "robinsonade" theories, according to Marx, could only have come into being at a fairly high stage of social development, or to be precise, these theories were a reflection of the atomized condition of individuals in bourgeois society.

In the interests of capitalism it was necessary to justify the equality of all members of society, since this would enable each man freely to dispose of his labour. At the same time the ideologues of the bourgeoisie were seeking for a basis for juridical equality in natural equality that might take the place of the inequality ordained by God. Those who paved the way for bourgeois revolution concurred within the assertion that since all people are animals, possessed since birth of more or less similar organs and physiological needs, they ought all to be recognized as members of society enjoying equal rights; the fact that at that stage there existed an hierarchy of social estates was interpreted by them as being a consequence of the existence of an incorrect social order that did not correspond to the essential nature of man, and that might be eliminated provided that Enlightenment spread. The reasons for the

change in the concept of man were rooted in a perfectly concrete situation: the class in the ascendant, the bourgeoisie, needed a new ideal of Man and this was duly provided. The main features of the new society found full expression in this ideal since man emerged in it as an isolated natural creature, because in the world where material things were all-important each individual assumed a position opposed to another as abstract labour power.

Diderot's conceptions of man and society did not differ at first glance from those of his contemporaries, and it seemed that they even gave to these ideas the clearest possible expression. In articles contributed to the *Encyclopédie* man is defined by him as a product of Nature, a creature possessed of a number of natural needs, whose satisfaction makes him happy; meanwhile, the failure to satisfy these needs or the absence of a possibility to do so proves a disaster. Each individual at the moment of his birth acquires a natural right to happiness, but man can only exercise that right in society. Here Diderot disagrees with the prominent English thinker Thomas Hobbes, who held that, in his natural state (by which he understood the life of an individual outside the collective) man finds himself in "a condition of war of everyone against everyone", since the needs and strengths of all people are more or less identical, while the possibilities for satisfying these needs are small. In Diderot's opinion not only are good and evil clearly distinguished in the heart of each individual in the natural state, but also each individual strives to behave in accordance

with his understanding of the former, in other words, he tries not to do to others what he does not want done to him. It is therefore not right to regard war as an inseparable part of man's natural (i.e. non-social) condition, but it is not enough to deny this, it is necessary to acknowledge that man needs to come together with other people, because without them he cannot take from Nature enough to be happy. People come together in society and voluntarily renounce some of their individual rights, in order to ultimately gain more. Although man is a natural creature like any other animal, self-love can never become the main motive behind his activity: "The will of individuals is suspect; it can be good or evil, but the common will is always good: it has never been wrong and will never be wrong."[1] Diderot assures us that everything the individual thinks up will be beneficial, great, lofty and wonderful, if it will correspond to the interests of all. Even when the meaning of the common will is interpreted differently by different peoples or at different times, it is always possible with adequate precision to judge whether something is good or evil, because these concepts are rooted deep in the heart of every man, above all in the requirement that common interests should take precedence over individual interests. Society is therefore viewed by Diderot as some sort of guarantor for the interests of the individual and it is defined by him as the totality of individual wills and desires. When people

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 15, p. 44.

unite in a collective they voluntarily renounce some of their claims and thereby freely impose limitations upon themselves so as to avoid clashes with others. The disinterested judge, supervising the implementation of the conditions of the contract, is the monarch, along with other persons administering the state. Hence it becomes clear that the more enlightened a monarch is as regards the essence of man and his needs, the more appropriate will be the structure of the state in question and the happier the life of its subjects.

Diderot maintains that in their natural condition, men knew no rulers, they were all equal amongst themselves and enjoyed complete independence. In this condition there is only one sort of subordination—subordination of children to their parents: "Yet it was not long before people began to notice that if each person continued to exercise his free will, his strength and his independence, and to give free rein to his passions, the situation of each individual would be more unfortunate than if he lived in isolation. He would realize that each man needs to forego some of his natural independence and submit to a will that represents the will of the whole of society and which would be, so to speak, the common centre and meeting point of all wills and all strength. Such is the origin of sovereigns. As we have seen, their power and their rights are founded only on the consent of the people."[1] This is why Diderot is of the opinion that the social order which would correspond

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 20, p. 13.

most closely to men's demands, is that in which legislative power would be in the hands of the people's representatives, who would at the same time control executive bodies and the monarch's power as well. For Diderot the most acceptable form of a state was the parliamentarian republic in which the King would, for all intents and purposes, play the role of President. Thus Diderot makes the transition from enlightened monarchy to parliamentarian republic; in his view the former constitutes the preliminary phase of the latter.

Such were the ideas propagated by the thinkers of the Enlightenment including Diderot in the time shortly before the Revolution. Yet behind these shared convictions, over which there was little doubt, and which championed every man's right to happiness, Diderot discerned something that might well be overlooked at first glance—differences and contradictions between the individual and the state, whose interests it had once appeared merely served to complement each other.

As mentioned earlier, the concept "natural", when anyone scrutinized it more carefully (as Diderot duly did), turned out to contain paradoxes: on the one hand, the man who in his behaviour was moulded by the physical organization of his physiological needs was designated as "natural"; at the same time, however, it was clear that man is not simply a natural creature, nor is he simply an animal, and that he behaves naturally, not when he bases his behaviour solely on his own inter-

ests but when he brings these into line with the interests of society.

The "natural" also turns out to be something highly individual, and in this sense spontaneously subconscious, but at the same time it is also something opposed to the above, i.e. it is not only corporeal but also intelligent, and therefore something that requires a definition incorporating implications of a social nature. Insofar as the concept of "natural man" provides the basis for the views propagated by the thinkers of the Enlightenment, the antinomy outlined above is the source of all other logical problems of that age.

Considering, as he did, that the individual was the starting point for the formation of society, Diderot believed that men's coming together was motivated by man's need to struggle with Nature: men came together in society like weak animals collecting together in a herd and motivated by their instinct. If Nature were to satisfy all man's needs tomorrow, then society would disintegrate immediately.

What does the social condition constitute? That is Diderot's next question and his reply is as follows: "It is a contract which brings together, unites and binds together a multitude of beings that were previously isolated. He who will thoroughly study the nature of the wild state and that of the civilized state, will soon realize that the former is of necessity a state of innocence and peace and the latter, a state of war and crime."[1] It is obvious

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 2, p. 287.

that Diderot disagrees with Hobbes, but he is also unable to agree with Rousseau that the wild state should be preferred to the civilized state, because civilization corrupts man: "It is not the fine arts that have corrupted morals and not science that has corrupted men," he writes in his attack against Rousseau's famous work. "Study history carefully and you will see that the corruption of morals stems from quite different causes. In turn, it has always brought in its wake corruption of taste: the decline of fine arts, contempt for science, ignorance, silliness and barbarism, not the barbarism from which a nation has been able to emerge, but a barbarism from which it will never be able to re-emerge."[1] According to Diderot, all disasters and misfortunes are not rooted in civilization as such, but in its distortions. Although sometimes it may appear that Diderot, like Rousseau sees depravity and civilization as one and the same thing, in reality his views are quite different: on several occasions Diderot raises the question as to whether we should prefer the wild, natural state to the civilized state and each time he comes out in favour of the latter. He acknowledges that even refined vice, swathed in silks, is better than insensitive cruelty in an animal's skin.

In the arguments between Diderot and Rousseau, a line is drawn between the various trends within the Enlightenment: Rousseau, being the ideologist of the petty bourgeoisie, tends to interpret what is natural as what is individual, while Diderot tends to view it as

[1] Diderot, *Textes politiques, op. cit.*, p. 163.

something more civilized and social, although the views of each one of them are fraught with internal contradictions. As an illustration of this we can take the works of Diderot such as *Réfutation suivie de l'ouvrage d'Helvétius intitulé l'Homme* (Refutation of Helvetius' work entitled "Man") and *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* (Supplement to Bougainville's "Voyage").

The Voyage, published in 1771 by Louis Antoine de Bougainville, the first Frenchman to circumnavigate the globe, was devoted to a description of various customs of the peoples encountered. In 1772, Diderot, who had taken a keen interest in this work and who had already emerged as an independent thinker with well developed ideas, wrote a Supplement to the work. In it he had set himself the task of finding on the basis of a comparative historical analysis the principles for the organization of a "genuine" human society. In a fictitious conversation between a European priest and a Tahitian chief by the name of Orou, he brings out the futility of Christian dogmas, the depravity of European civilization and the purity of Tahitian morals. He asks whether we ought to continue living the way Europeans had been living up till then or whether it would be more reasonable to return to the natural state still to be found in Tahiti? Here it is necessary to bear in mind that Diderot in this instance is implying by the term "natural state" not the isolated existence of single individuals, but a social organization, albeit one which has not yet been subjected to the pernicious influence of corruption.

There can only be one answer to that question. It is better to live as the Tahitians do, since they have succeeded in making two separate codes compatible—the laws of Nature and civic laws, while in the civilized world there always exists a gulf between the two. The Tahitians had also succeeded in avoiding the influence of Church morality, while in Europe religion always wedged itself between natural and civic laws, distorting both.

What do the laws of Nature constitute? What does living in accordance with the laws of Nature really mean? The Tahitian instructs the European as follows: "Hold fast to the nature of things and of actions; to your relations with your fellows; to the influence of your conduct on your individual usefulness and the general good. You are mad if you believe that there is anything high or low in the Universe, which can add to or subtract from the laws of Nature. Her eternal will is that good should be preferred to evil, and the general good to the individual good".[1] Such are the fundamental and immutable principles of a truly humane way of life: preferring good to evil and the interests of society to personal interests. Admittedly the question then arises as to how we should define what is good and what is evil. Diderot provides an answer without the slightest hesitation and very much in keeping with the spirit of the times: good is the striving for pleasure without encroaching upon the interests of other people, while evil is when the individual

[1] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 166.

is deprived of this striving or himself tries to rob others of it. The difference between good and evil constitutes the immutable and eternal natural law, which is "written in our hearts in letters so beautiful, and with expressions so powerful and so radiant that it is impossible to fail to recognise it".[1]

There are people, wrote Diderot, who have been so corrupted by a bad upbringing and who have become so accustomed to vice that they pretend they do not notice the difference between good and evil, but in their heart of hearts they are clearly aware of it, because "the letters of virtue are written deep in our souls", they shall never be erased and "they are as simple to understand as the rules of the most ordinary of arts".[2]

Thus Nature makes man good and upright, filling his heart with a clear understanding of what good and evil are; in other words, men are naturally inclined only to do good, while evil is a product of civilization, admittedly not all kinds of civilization, but a product of distorted, false, unenlightened civilization.

The Tahitians live in complete accord with Nature and it was Diderot's firm conviction that "except in this remote corner of our globe, there has never been morality, and perhaps there never will be anywhere."[3]

In the context of these ideas society emerges as no more or less than an organization guaranteeing the satisfaction of natural (basic-

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[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 16, 1876, p. 3.

[2] *Ibidem.*

[3] *Diderot Interpreter of Nature, op. cit.*, p. 181.

ally physiological) needs of the individual and it gives him nothing apart from what Nature had bestowed upon him at the moment of his birth. All norms of behaviour in society, all principles of morality and all men's aspirations can in the final analysis only be explained on this basis and those feelings and desires which are deduced from it cannot be pronounced absurd. Diderot wrote: "We have at birth only a similarity of organization with other beings, the same needs, an attraction towards the same pleasures, a common aversion for the same pains; that is what makes man what he is, and which ought to be the basis of the morality suitable for him".[1]

All man's feelings, including his love for other persons, for his wife, for his children, grow up on the basis of the common interest which stems from man's personal aspiration towards pleasure. When describing the customs of the Tahitians Diderot assures his reader that "wherever a man shall be as attached to the preservation of his fellow man as to his bed, his health, his repose, his hut, his produce and his fields, he will do for him all that it is possible for him to do. It is here that tears moisten the pillow of a sick child; it is here that we prize a fertile woman, a daughter ripe for marriage, an adolescent boy. It is here that we take care to see that they may establish themselves appropriately, because *their preservation is always a gain, and their loss always a diminution of fortune*" (my italics—*T. D.*).[2] In Tahiti there are no illegitimate children—

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 182.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

each child is a wanted child, because a specific share of social wealth is assigned to him and because he will grow into a new workman. In Tahiti there are no illicit liaisons—they are all licit since children in their capacity as future workmen are society's prime need.

All these assertions strike Diderot as true and reasonable. How does it look, however, when it comes to those feelings which cannot in any way lead to an increase in wealth, which cannot in any way be linked to personal or social benefit? Is love possible, for example, as something separate from the desire to have a child—in particular, love for a woman who is known in advance not to be capable of bearing a child? Here in Diderot's writings there come to light the narrowly mercenary, purely bourgeois horizons of the noble ideas of the Enlightenment and the "natural" quality of these ideas begins to emerge as inhumane. In Tahiti love for a woman who cannot have children is seen as tantamount to dissipation and it is prohibited. Those found indulging in this crime are either sent to carry out the hardest forms of labour, or they are turned into slaves.

It turns out that the feelings of "natural" savages and civilized people differ in certain respects, in such a way as to put the latter rather then the former in a more favourable light. In Tahiti the feeling of jealousy is virtually unknown, yet tender affection between spouses and maternal love are also virtually unknown. These two emotions are seen by Diderot as some of the most powerful and most sweet. Diderot lends his support to the

words of the Tahitian, when he seeks to convince the European priest that the Tahitians have "replaced them by another (emotion—*T. D.*), which in another fashion is quite general, powerful and lasting, namely interest", that "the passion of love, reduced there to a simple physical appetite, produced none of our disturbances".[1] Doubts regarding the correctness of these principles began to haunt Diderot right from the beginning, and it was precisely this doubt which led him to refute Helvétius' arguments, when the latter made the principle of interest his philosophical credo.

Helvétius' book *De l'Esprit* (Essays on the Mind), which was published anonymously in 1758, aroused the wrath of almost all strata of educated French society of the day. A mere two weeks after its publication it was banned and then orders were given by Parliament for it to be burned. At the same time a ban was placed on the *Encyclopèdie* as well, since the Avocat général of the whole of France, de Fleury had noticed a similarity between the ideas expressed in the two famous books. Nevertheless, strange as it may seem, many of the Encyclopaedists found this work of Helvétius not to their liking. As for Rousseau, he publicly broke with the *Encyclopèdie* after 1757 and indeed Voltaire, Grimm and many others viewed it negatively by that time. Writers who had once shared his ideas were now criticizing Helvétius, not of course for trying to construct a theory of the state

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 180.

and to elaborate the fundamental principles of ethics on a basis different from any used before, namely on a non-religious basis, and not even for formulating the principle of usefulness, which Helvétius placed at the centre of human life and which shed too much light on the unattractive essence of bourgeois society. Most of all they criticized him for the fact that thanks to his efforts the trend in the views of the writers of the Enlightenment which represented a threat to the existence of their fundamental premises had been shown up for that it was: in other words, without intending to do so Helvétius had revealed the contradictory essence of the ideas of the Enlightenment. Diderot was one of the first to realize this and he succeeded in doing so because, thanks to his own principle of investigation he was able to outstrip the other writer, drawing all the conclusions to be drawn from the premises accepted by Helvétius, compelling him, as it were, to carry through his ideas and appreciate the paradoxality of his own conclusions. This applied first and foremost to the concept of "interest".

Helvétius' books *De l'Esprit* (Essays on the Mind) and *De l'Homme* (Essays on Man—written in 1772 but not published during the writer's lifetime) have in common one central idea. They demonstrate that it is precisely "interest" which provides the motivating force behind the actions both of whole states and of individuals.

Totally in accord with the basic premise of the Enlightenment Helvétius asserts that "grief and pleasure are the only movers of the moral

universe" and that "the sensation of self-love is the only basis on which we can place the foundation of a useful morality".[1] It might seem that that really was the case: after all, man cannot love others more than himself and this preference is dictated by Nature herself. Moreover, the urge to obtain pleasure is dictated by the desire to satisfy natural, physiological needs. It is only on this basis that passions come into play, passions from which stem vices or virtue.

It is impossible to change human nature and man behaves in a virtuous way only if he is not forced to sacrifice his personal interests to the interests of society. Hence, the task facing the law-maker does not lie, in Helvétius' opinion, in compelling every human being to do what goes against his personal desires, i.e. his personal interest (even if this is justified in view of various weighty social reasons), but it consists in linking virtue and personal interest in such a way as to make virtue advantageous for the individual. Helvétius wrote: "It is the legislation, if I may venture to say so, that excites us to vice, by mingling it with pleasure; the great art of the legislator is that of separating them, and making no proportion between the advantage the villain can receive from his crime, and the pain to which he exposes himself".[2] It is impossible here not to recall the words of Rameau to the effect that if virtue chanced to lead to wealth, then he would be the most virtuous

[1] C. A. Helvêtius, *De l'Esprit, or Essays on the Mind and Its Several Faculties, op. cit.*, p. 179.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 291.

of men. As if following on from these words Helvétius writes that "the continual declamations of moralists against the malignity of mankind are a proof of their knowing but little of human nature. Men are not cruel and perfidious, but they are carried away by their own interest. The declamations of the moralist will certainly make no change in this moral spring of the universe".[1]

Helvétius faced the opposition not only of his enemies, but also of his former friends; however, he had only taken to its logical conclusion one of the fundamental postulates of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, since the theory of interest appeared as a result of the logical development of the concept of "natural man". Let us return once again to this central concept of the age of Enlightenment.

Developing, in opposition to the feudal-estate ideology, their understanding of man as a natural being who received from Nature at the moment of his birth all human properties, abilities, requirements and desires, the thinkers of the Enlightenment were certain that, as a result, a man could exist "in isolation"—later Marx will refer to this concept as "the robinsonade". In fact, of course, people unite together in society, gradually coming to the conclusion that it is among others like themselves that they will be able to obtain the most at the least cost. Having realized this, they conclude a "social contract". However, society is a "secondary" structure in relation

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

to the individual. It is necessary to each individual as a form of guarantee of his individual natural rights and requirements.

On entering into the "social contract", people are gradually obliged to sacrifice some of their aspirations in order not to lose everything in a "war of all against all", but as society exists only for the sake of the interests of the individual, such self-restriction by each is a necessary, but not a natural measure; what is natural, on the contrary, is the desire for unlimited satisfaction of personal desires. But what exactly does this mean?

Insofar as man was initially viewed outside society, his essence is not seen as being social, and therefore the ultimate factor determining the conduct of the individual is identified as being his "physical nature" or his "physical sensitivity"; this, in turn, is determined by the love of what is pleasurable, again understood predominately in the physiological sense. Can one oppose one's requirements, as they arise from the essential nature of man? Apparently not, and to hide this would be hypocrisy.

In full accord with these views, Helvétius then develops the theory not only of interest, but personal interest, which is reduced to obtaining pleasure: "If the physical universe be subject to the laws of motion", he writes, "the moral universe is equally so to those of interest. Interest is, on earth, the mighty magician, which to the eyes of every creature changes the appearance of all objects".[1] "For, after all, interest is always obeyed; hence the

[1] Ibid., p. 42.

injustice of all our judgements, and the appellations of just and unjust are lavished on the same actions, according to the advantage resulting from them to particulars".[1]

Thus we have approached closer to our goal, which is to illustrate that the theory of interest (based upon the concept of "natural man") determines morality. If one proceeds from the premise that human nature prompts people to seek what is pleasurable and that this is perfectly natural (and reasonable, since, in the eyes of the philosophers of the Enlightenment, that is rational which corresponds to Nature), the inevitable consequence will be the conviction that "...what each individual calls Probity in another [is] only the habitude of actions which are useful to him".[2] People owe all their vices and virtues, argues Helvétius, solely to the changes to which personal interest is subject, and "this principle is so much in conformity with experience that, without undertaking further investigation, I consider myself justified in concluding that personal interest is the sole and universal measure of the value of human actions, and that decency, from the point of view of the individual, according to my definition, is merely the habit on the part of that individual of acting in a manner advantageous to him".[3]

However, does not morality, as a result, lose its very foundation? Since, as we have

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[1] *Ibidem.*

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[3] Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, Editions Gerard & Co., Verviers, 1973, p. 60.

seen, morality is assessed in terms of advantage, and since, as is frankly admitted by Helvétius himself, no one prefers good for the sake of good itself, the measure of human behaviour becomes utility, interest. Is it meaningful to talk of morality when everything is motivated by advantage?

There are, it is true, says Helvétius, qualifying his argument, people whose happy natural gifts and ardent desire for honour and respect inspire in them a love of justice and virtue such as men usually feel for power and wealth, but... "the number of these men is so small, that I only mention them in honour of humanity".[1] In other words, such people are an exception, but not the rule.

Consideration of these arguments reveals a certain discrepancy between the basic principles of Enlightenment philosophy and its conclusions. Indeed, as soon as one speaks of interest in general and individual interest in particular, one faces the question of how is this to be accorded with the maxims of truth, justice, equality, brotherhood, etc., proclaimed by the ideologists of the bourgeois revolution? Where is truth, where is justice, if all is determined by usefulness?

On the other hand, however, can we explain human actions in any other way except by reference to advantage and personal interest, if this is the language in which Nature itself talks to men?

One is left with the impression that Helvétius is absolutely correct, and he is not alone

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[1] Helvétius, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

in supporting such conclusions. He is joined by Holbach, who shares the concept of "physical nature" as the sole stimulus and measure of human behaviour. If all human behaviour is ultimately defined by this physical nature, and "being virtuous in the morning, by evening becomes evil", then the blame lies with his blood circulation, the composition of the air he breathes and food he eats (and today one would add—blood pressure, genes, etc.)—but not the man himself. Holbach observed: "If the essence of man motivates him to seek happiness and self-preservation, if all the movements of his organic machine are the inevitable consequences of this original impulse, if pain warns him what he must avoid; if pleasure tells him what he must strive for, then, by virtue of his nature, man must love that which evokes in him or promises him pleasant sensations, and hate that which brings him the opposite sensations and obliges him to fear them".[1]

Determined in all his actions, in all his aspirations by "physical nature" (for this read: by the aspiration towards pleasure and by personal interest), man is recognized as not being free, since everything that happens to him is caused not by man himself, but by his nature. However, if he is not free, may one blame him for anything, may one inflict punishment or give praise? Is courage, is morality in general, possible within society if such is the case? Is there any basis, for example, for dividing men into good and bad, virtuous

[1] Holbach, *Système de la Nature, op. cit.*, p. 189.

and evil, just and unjust? It would seem that there is not—they can only be considered as different people, each of whom is obeying his nature, his interest; that their interests clash is something for which, naturally, no one can be blamed.

In Holbach we find not a few statements declaring that man is not free for one moment in his life: "his every step is of necessity governed by real or imaginary advantages which he associates with objects arousing his passions".[1] "Is it not obvious to him that his temperament in no way depends on the man himself, that his passions are the unavoidable consequence of this temperament, and that his desires and actions are determined by these passions and views that are accepted independently of his own will".[2] For this reason, legislators should not punish people severely, and a system of fatalism of this kind should, in Holbach's view, presuppose a lenient attitude towards them. However, perhaps the very lawfulness of punishment and reward should be brought into question? People are not free, and this means that they are not responsible for their actions.

Probably no one preached these views so openly as the patriarch of the Enlighteners, La Mettrie, who, because of his frankness, also brought down upon himself the ridicule and hatred of his society (it is even thought that it was La Mettrie who served as the prototype for Rameau's nephew). If nature itself determines the behaviour of the individual,

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 203.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 74.

it is pointless to coerce, for nature is the basis of human life, in the continuation of which man remains as he was created by nature. Therefore, "Cartouche was created in order to be a Cartouche [the thief—*Tr.*], as Pyrrhus was created to be Pyrrhus [the conqueror—*Tr.*]... the first was created for surreptitious theft and murder, and the second for open murder. Advice is useless for one who was born with a thirst for carnage and bloodshed. One can listen to them, even applaud them, but not follow them."[1]

Seen from this point of view, people are not good or bad, but simply different; therefore, "convention and arbitrary evaluation alone determine what is called vice and virtue".[2] Consequently it is meaningless to speak of virtue (morality) as such; if it has any meaning, it is revealed yet again through the prism of advantage: the virtuous is that which brings advantage, under which one can include, for example, the desire to create a good opinion of oneself. Thus "in the final analysis we are, in the majority of cases, true show-offs in relation to virtue: its beneficient effects have no value unless they cause a noise... There are very few virtues that men do not seek to parade. There are very few Carneades who do good for the sake of good, and even to the detriment of their own well-being".[3] One can only pity men, says La Mettrie in this connection, in that their destiny should have fallen in such bad hands as their own, but it is difficult to

[1] La Mettrie, *Œuvres philosophiques,* Vol. 2, p. 212.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 145.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

doubt that "virtue is something unexpected, it is a strange adornment which, if no care is taken to support it, is ready to disappear or fall away at any moment".[1] Such, in the words of La Mettrie, is Nature reduced to its pure essence, as it were.

If this is indeed so, then men must be spared the pangs of conscience, for these are an ineffective medicine against our ills; they cloud even the clearest waters without in any way purifying even the most muddy. Pangs of conscience do not make men better, and therefore the desire to become free of them does not present any danger for society but, on the contrary, promises peace to its members.

The result of all these arguments can be only one: it had previously seemed incontrovertible that Nature is rational; it was precisely this rational nature which the philosophers of the Enlightenment had taken as the basis of their programme for a new society, it was precisely this which was to serve as the guide for enlightened education. However, suddenly it was discovered that Nature is not, after all, so benevolent: if it creates good men, they are in the minority. Moulding personal interest within men, it predetermines vices. Can education correct Nature? If it can, then does not Nature cease to be the sole incontrovertible foundation of human life, and then education will have nothing to base itself on? If not, then the principle of education nonetheless still collapses as it is not capable of "overcoming" Nature—when a man is good by his nature, there

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

is no need to educate him; when he is bad by nature, then it is impossible to educate him.

Yet the Enlighteners would not have been the Enlighteners if, notwithstanding these paradoxes, they had not recognized the decisive role of education. Having arrived at contradictory conclusions, they still insisted that education is effective, asserting that education was not only able to change the evil inclinations of men, but that its task lay precisely in altering Nature. "By no means leaving men to their own nature which is—alas!—far too sterile to yield fruit, they had to educate them and, so to speak, graft onto them at that period when the juice can penetrate most easily into the grafted branch," wrote La Mettrie.[1] "An educated soul no longer desires or does that which it desired and did earlier, when it was guided solely by itself."[2]

There was, in fact, not one among the philosophers of the Enlightenment who did not speak loudly and eloquently on the subject of education—the Enlighteners were Enlighteners because they placed all their hopes on correct education, on Enlightenment.

However, together with education their attention is focused on moral problems, for education is called upon to transform bad people into good, the cowardly into the courageous, the weak into the strong. And those same philosophers who previously asserted that pangs of conscience are nothing other than cockle from which society must be freed, that the only significance possessed by virtue is the advan-

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 167.
[2] *Ibidem.*

tage it brings, that each must be guided solely by personal interest, now sing hymns to courage and praise moral power. That same La Mettrie who declared that "virtue and probity are of themselves alien to the nature of our being"[1] now calls for tribute to be paid even to the most fruitless moral efforts, and expresses the wish that all people were mild, noble, gentle, flawless, generous, compassionate, without envy, and that they would have no desire other than the desire to be of benefit to others. "Weak and cowardly hearts fall under the burden of adversity; souls that are strong and courageous, particularly if they are enlightened and combine education with a happy structure of their organism, can withstand it. Let us march tirelessly forward, striving not to stumble along this noble path,"[2] he writes.

Holbach, who earlier requested legislators to soften punishments as men are not responsible for the fact that their passions and temperament compel them to commit evil actions and even crimes, now applies to men the whole measure of responsibility, dividing them into the malefactors and the virtuous, the good and the wicked. In his words, "even if one supposes that a man, having committed one action, was acting under the force of necessity, nonetheless his action is either good or bad, meriting either respect or contempt from all those who have felt upon themselves its effect, and whose love or hatred it is capable of evoking".[3]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 205.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 169.
[3] Holbach, *Système de la Nature, op. cit.*, p. 225.

So we see that the philosophers of the Enlightenment constantly revolved in a circle of contradictions—having declared nature to be the ultimate basis and sole measure of human actions, so that education was, as it were, called upon merely to clarify this simple truth and mould men in conformity with Nature, these philosophers were, as a result, obliged to recognize personal interest and the consequent love of what gave pleasure as the motive force in the life of the individual, and therefore to deny morality and responsibility. However, having reached this point, the ideologists of the French Revolution were brought to a halt in amazement, realizing that these conclusions would contradict all the postulates of the new outlook, and were then obliged to seek to reformulate them. Education, they argue, is called upon to correct human vices and to perfect virtue, and moral merit is seen as the most precious social possession.

In all of this, however, one thing remains unclear. If education is able to overcome that evil which is born of Nature, then does it not become a factor more powerful than Nature itself? Does not Nature then cease to be the sole force determining the behaviour of men?

It also ceases to be the sole basis in a situation where the philosophers of the Enlightenment seek to lay responsibility for vice, evil, crime, etc., not on Nature but on society; if Holbach is correct in saying that it is not Nature which makes us ambitious, greedy, arrogant, dissolute, envious, etc., but those fatal views which we drink in with our mother's milk, then it is not clear how these vices can

develop in society if they are not determined by Nature. If, however, it is Nature which is determining them, and thus it is Nature which "with one and the same hand distributes that which we call order and disorder, pleasure and suffering",[1] then why should education be directed towards the former and not the latter, and in what way does it overcome evil?

It turns out that the concept of Nature, including human nature, is by no means as simple as first appeared; it is perhaps for this reason that the initial correspondence of the concepts "natural" and "rational" begins, on closer examination, to collapse, and they begin to oppose each other.

This strange situation derives also from the fact that, the more rigorously logical the argumentation of any thesis, the more inevitable becomes the discovery of its inconsistency. Such paradoxes were, to some degree or other, characteristic of all the philosophers of the Enlightenment, but were expressed in what was probably their most acute form in Helvétius and Rousseau.

We have already spoken of Helvétius. As regards Rousseau, the essence of his concept (over which, moreover, he differed with all the other Enlightenment philosophers) lies in the following. Rousseau, like Helvétius, sets out using the fundamental concepts of the Enlightenment, namely "nature" and "natural man"; from these he concludes that the qualities which should be cultivated in man are those which correspond to his nature. But what

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 246.

corresponds to his nature? A close examination of Rousseau's arguments reveals that, in the final analysis, he is speaking of individual, and at the same time primarily physiological qualities. According to Rousseau, education should ensure that a man is healthy, leads a moderate and proper way of life, and engages in labour—not excessively but as much as is necessary in order to earn his daily bread and preserve his health. All this is considered "natural", and, as can be easily seen, behind it lies something of an individual-physiological order.

Rousseau is far from denying the functions of education (it is indicative in this respect that one of his most well-known novels, *Emile,* is sub-titled *Traité de l'Education*—Treatise on Education), but education should be orientated towards the individual-atomic natural qualities. As for other human requirements (such as, for example, the aesthetic), Rousseau brings these into question precisely because they do not have their source either in individual or in physiological existence.

It is the orientation of education on individual nature, and the interpretation of nature as being atomic-individual which finally leads Rousseau to deny such "non-individual" interests as the aesthetic, the scientific, etc. As a result, nature and civilization exist for Rousseau in different dimensions.

At the same time we know that there was probably no other thinker of the French Enlightenment who had a deeper perception of the social essence of man. It was he who was the author of *Contrat Social,* and it was

his ideas which inspired the whole of the French Revolution.

The paradoxes of Rousseau and the paradoxes of Helvétius are the paradoxes of an age and have their roots in the contradictory, antinomic understanding of Nature in general and human nature in particular. The contradictions hidden in the depths of mechanistic, including French, materialism were the result of its ambivalent approach to any object of study. On the one hand, the object must be abstracted from all others and examined independently of external influences. In other words, in order to understand individual phenomena, we must remove them from their connection with the whole, isolate them from all the other phenomena. The result is recognition of the independence of each object, which is endowed with its own motion. On the other hand, the given object must be seen in its connection with all the other phenomena, that is, it must be seen within the context of general interaction. In this case the object loses its independence, and its existence and motion are explained by reference to the action of external causes upon it. This is a contradiction, and one cannot say that the French materialists did not perceive it.

However, they assumed that this contradiction could be removed by using the concept of aggregate mechanistic motion. Thus, for example, Holbach attributes to each body an immanent inherent force, and he is convinced that the contradiction between this force and the external force disappears as a result of their combination: "Any object can act and move only in a certain manner, that is, in ac-

cord with the laws deriving from its own essential nature," he writes, "but whatever the motion of bodies, they are the necessary consequence of their essence, of their properties, and the properties of those causes which act upon these bodies."[1]

It would therefore seem that the motion of any body included within the system of various interactions, is exactly the same as its motion in isolation, as the motions of all the other bodies acting upon it in various directions annul each other. In reality, however, this is not the case: in the isolated state it is the law of inertia which operates; in the system of reciprocal interaction, the cause of the motion of any body is stated to be not that body itself, but another body. And although the contradictory principles of motion are hidden by the concept of aggregate motion, they still reveal themselves in one way or another, leading the representatives of mechanistic materialism to questions relating to the qualitative originality of matter and the diversity of types of motion, to the distinction between the animate and the inanimate, the thinking from the non-thinking (examples of which can be found in their works).

This ambiguous approach determines the antinomic-contradictory interpretation of human nature given by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. First, each man is seen as a purely natural being, all of whose qualities are determined by nature and who, as was stated earlier, can therefore exist isolated from all

[1] Holbach *Systéme de la Nature, op. cit.*, , p. 16.

other men and is guided solely by his egoistic interests. At the same time, the individual is seen not only in his isolated state, but in his existence in society, which arises, in the opinion of these philosophers, as the result of a "social contract". In this case the behaviour of each individual is directed towards others, and his feelings, to use the words of Diderot, are "purely social pleasures and sufferings".

In this way the nature of man proves dichotomic, divided, and its definition becomes contradictory. According to Rousseau not only self-love, but also love for others is inherent to man, as are the feelings of compassion and pity. For La Mettrie, it is not only the egoistic aspirations of man which are natural, but also his moral concepts, which he includes in the sphere of operation of "natural law"—"a feeling that teaches us what we should not do, because we do not wish it to be done to us",[1] a natural feeling which therefore does not presuppose "education, revelation nor legislation".[2]

So, as the philosophers of the Enlightenment understand it, human nature is contradictory—moral and immoral, egoistical and altruistic, physiological and non-physiological (which was discussed in § 2).

What is to be done about this contradiction? Let us recall that at that time, due to the fact that the methods of mechanistic natural science had penetrated into philosophy, the absence or elimination of contradiction was a con-

[1] La Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, the Open Court Publishing Co., La Salle, Illinois, 1943, p. 121.

[2] *Ibidem.*

sciously accepted postulate in any argumentation. Therefore contradiction was removed by attributing the opposing qualities to different "natures"—the individual and the social—and even to two different subjects—"natural man" and the "social individual", and from thence by producing the externally non-contradictory, mechanistic combination of contradictory characteristics. It seemed that the two "natures" of man were united in an integral concept of his existence by the summation of the attributes of two genera, and the apparent possibility of a purely superficial, mechanistic combination created the illusion of the absence of contradiction, although in reality this very possibility was the consequence of an axiomatic rejection of contradiction.

For the Enlightenment, education became the synthesis which abolished the contradiction between the two "natures" of man. Education was called upon to establish "equilibrium" between them, and was to achieve this, according to the philosophers of the Enlightenment by educating in accord with the "natural" (i. e. the individual) essence of man, and simultaneously in accord with his social nature, arising on the basis of the social contract. Education was the cutting edge of the whole of the philosophical and ideological programme of these philosophers; in this context the socium was to be reorganized so that education could yield its fruit. The only compass for education was reason: only reason could determine how to correlate the two differing "natures" of man, only with the help of reason could one discover which qualities, determined by these two

different "natures", were to be developed and which were to be limited. Only education could eliminate contradiction.

From this position, to act rationally is to act not simply in accord with nature; to act rationally is to act "on one nature" and simultaneously "on the other nature". In brief, where a rupture emerges between these two natures, a lack of correspondence in nature with itself, reason appears, arising in this gap and establishing between the two natures an internal bond.

One hundred years later, Marx would produce a critical analysis of the preceding understanding of history, including that of the French Enlightenment, and would, in close connection with this, not only reveal the social essence of man, but also explain why, in the eighteenth century, the concept of man was formulated in such a dogmatic-dichotomic form, with the interests of the individual being deduced from his physical-individual nature, as a result of which the contradiction between individual and social interests assumes the form of an "eternal" contradiction, that is, an abstract-non-historical form. According to Marx, the very form of the conflict between the individual and society, its expression via the opposition of two "natures" and the identification of the individual with the atomic-natural, was determined by a quite specific, historically concrete socium.

Did Diderot have any advantage over his contemporaries in this area? To some extent he did. While all the others were convinced that the contradiction between the two "na-

tures" of man could be eliminated by a rational education, Diderot, alone of the entire cohort of the Enlightenment philosophers (with the possible exception of Rousseau), succeeded in appreciating that this contradiction could not be overcome, and in reproducing it in the form of a dichotomy: a reason corresponding to the individual nature of man, and a reason corresponding to his social nature. In other words, he discovered the contradictory aspect of reason itself. We have seen this in his novels *Le Neveu de Rameau* and *Jacques le fataliste...*, in his polemic with Helvétius in *Réfutation suivie de l'ouvrage d'Helvétius intitulé l'Homme,* which he wrote at approximately the same time as his *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville,* in 1773-1774.

Then, however, Diderot begins systematically to read Helvétius' work and realizes that he will have to object to almost every point, gradually coming round to a negation not only of personal interest but also to a negation of the physical nature of man as the basis of his life and morality, because otherwise virtually all human qualities would be called into question. Helvétius declares for example: "All that man loves in virtue is the wealth and respect that can be acquired through it." In this connection Diderot comments that "While this is true in general, when it comes to particular instances nothing could be further from the truth"[1] than that assertion. From his subsequent comments it becomes clear that

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 2, p. 393.

in general Diderot is not completely confident in the correctness of this thesis, since the "flowers of virtue" definitely do not flourish in the soil of physical pleasure, but on different soil: "Is it true that physical suffering and pleasure—perhaps the only principles behind the action of the animal—are also the only principles behind the action of Man? It is, of course, necessary to be organized like us and to feel in order to act; but it seems that these are the essential, primary conditions, the *sine qua non,* and that the immediate motives behind our desires and antipathies are something different".[1] Diderot was attempting in this way to distinguish between the social and the physiological, seeing the former as cause and the latter as prerequisite (or condition) and he was quite convinced that they were not one and the same thing.

Helvétius' opinion to the effect that "physical sensitivity was the only motive for man's actions" seemed to Diderot as "almost obviously false". Helvétius maintained that a ploughman, for example, works in order to feed himself, clothe himself and so as to be able to dress his wife or mistress. In Diderot's eyes this was not totally true in relation to the ploughman and quite wrong when it came to such men as Leibniz or Newton. Diderot was quite convinced that when Leibniz at the age of twenty shut himself up in his room and then spent thirty years sitting in a dressing gown probing the secrets of geometry or lost in the labyrinth of metaphysics, he was

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 302.

not thinking about gaining any post, sleeping with a woman or filling an old chest with gold with any more interest than if he had reached the last moments of his life. Diderot felt quite sure that if he had been offered the most beautiful of women with the proviso that he were to stop solving his problems then he would have lost all interest in the offer. Again, "if you offer him the post of First Minister on condition that he throw into the fire his treatise on pre-established harmony, he will turn down the offer".[1] It is also well known what kind of persecution Helvétius was subjected to on account of his first work *De l'Esprit*, although it was definitely not financial necessity that had led Helvétius to write it. Diderot asks: "What was your aim when you wrote the work that was only to appear in print after your death? What goals had countless other anonymous authors set themselves? What might be the source of man's unquenchable desire to carry out certain actions at the moment when such actions become dangerous?"[2] When Helvétius began worrying about how to make scholars' love for learning compatible with their love for physical pleasure Diderot immediately assured him that "the two are quite irreconcilable".[3]

Helvétius insisted that pleasure and pain were the only springs behind man's actions. Diderot was prepared to agree with that but he added that he negated the *conclusions*

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 2, p. 311.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 314.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 318.

drawn from Helvétius' argument (if not the underlying principles themselves): "You only accept physical pleasure and pain as motives for action... You say sensitivity is the cause of pain, while I insist that sensitivity is only a remote, essential and primary condition of pain" (only a condition, not the cause of pain—*T. D.*).[1] As Diderot saw it, viewing conditions as causes meant risking infantile paralogisms and perfectly worthless deductions.

This was the standpoint which Diderot then took and the power of his polemical talent was directed at demonstrating that it was definitely not physical need, and therefore not personal advantage that determine man's behaviour but something fundamentally different. He directs the following rhetorical question at Helvétius: "Would you negate good deeds carried out secretly, or would you merely explain them in the light of hope for chance circumstances that would bring them to light? What would you see as the physical goal of such actions, and what goal does man set himself when he sacrifices his life? Did Codrus and Décius expect to find any physical pleasure in their graves, at the bottom of the precipice?"[2] And could it be that criminals on the way to their execution only experienced physical pain?

Thus Diderot came round to the conclusion that "there exist purely social pleasures and suffering which fill men with rapture or de-

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 310.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 304.

spair and have no bearing—either obvious or concealed—on physical consequences. I would often prefer an attack of gout to the slightest expression of contempt in relation to myself".[1] "In order to understand suffering and avoid it, and in order to wish for pleasure or to delight in it, there is always a definite motive that can be reduced to something other than physical sensitivity".[2]

Thus the premise upheld by the thinkers of the Enlightenment and defended by Helvétius was being called into question: the principle of personal interest, personal benefit determined, in its turn, by man's physical organization.

Does not the state of affairs appear different when it is education that comes up for discussion? On that subject, too, Diderot and Helvétius switched places. Helvétius was inclined to believe that a human being could be made into a genius or a dolt, good or evil, and that responsibility in this sphere lay only with society (consequently natural, innate needs do not determine man's destiny, but the nature of society, whether it is enlightened or unenlightened), while Diderot insisted that Nature was of primary importance in this matter. Helvétius regarded men's minds, genius and virtue as "fruits of enlightenment" while Diderot was to ask whether enlightenment was their only cause. Although their debate centred mainly on men's talents and the mind, it also touched upon the foundations

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 304.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 318.

of morality. Diderot was listening to the voice of Nature while Helvétius heard the voice of the educator. Helvétius maintained, for example, that there existed good men, but that "the humanity in them is the product of education and not that of Nature".[1] Diderot objected to that: "I hold a quite different opinion. Whatever education might give the human animal, who followed with curiosity and pleasure the convulsions of a Capuchin monkey, it would be quite impossible to make of him a gentle, compassionate man".[2] In this instance Diderot was laying all responsibility at the door of Mother Nature, while earlier he had blamed enlightened society. This shift of emphasis is particularly striking when the question of human talent is discussed. Diderot wanted to know how interest, on which Helvétius had laid the main emphasis, and also education and chance could lend warmth to a cold person, fill a methodical mind with creative inspiration, or foster imagination in a man deprived of the latter. The more Diderot thought about this question the more untenable he found Helvétius' paradoxes: after all, if an artist did not glean inspiration from Nature, the very finest education would only enable him more or less successfully to feign inspiration. Over half of Diderot's *Réfutation...* is devoted to discussion of this problem. Without examining here in detail whether Diderot investigated this question correctly or incorrectly, it is worth turning our atten-

[1] Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, Vol. 2, p. 35.

[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 2, p. 408.

tion to the fact that at this point in the argument Diderot's sympathies are on the side of Nature or naturalness with regard to its manifestations in the individual. As he saw it, if man is "by nature" not capable of something, "enlightening" him in that respect would be futile. Education would only make him unhappy, and, as Rameau had already said in that connection, it would change nothing. Diderot went on to ask what benefit there would be from such "enlightenment" and to inquire whether, if man's virtue and talents were products of Nature and education could only follow after Nature, then what was the point of talking about social pleasures and pain that had been discussed earlier.

Surely Diderot was contradicting himself here, but these contradictions could not be regarded as miscalculations and mistakes of Diderot himself, since they reflected the contradictions of logic intrinsic to the reasoning of the Encyclopaedists, including that concerned with the interpretation of man and society. Earlier reference was made to the inadequacy of the definition of man merely as an individual, natural being, since when this approach is adopted real social links are ignored. Yet this interpretation also has certain advantages. The fact of the matter is that in society there always takes place a production process (which in certain historical conditions is alienated from man) and therefore any attempt to single out individual human characteristics that do not coincide with the social characteristics would mean, first, that man stands apart from the production process and

only for this reason is able to reflect upon it and change it, and second, that in the context of social antagonisms the individual has a chance of remaining aloof from the alienated social condition. Individuality is always a product of culture (i.e. a social product), but not always something that can be associated with the culture of production, and still less so with regard to the alienation of social production. This very individuality was interpreted by the thinkers of the Enlightenment as something possessing a highly specific, "non-cultured" natural form, i.e. as something in a form which appeared opposite to the mechanism of production as it existed at that time. Between these two extreme interpretations of that which is individual—the "social" vs. the "natural"—the ideas of the Encyclopaedists were hovering virtually all the time, giving rise to contradictory explanations, which were always at the centre of Diderot's attention as paradoxes. However, actually formulating the question meant acknowledging the existence of something outside the framework of what was generally known, generally accepted and comprehensible to all as that which has the right to exist, although it is not yet understood. Here logical problem lies in the fact that the incomprehensible, i.e. that which has not been understood and consequently has not become a subject for reflection, has nevertheless already been interpreted—but only as a problem of task. (See the detailed examination of this question in the book *Myshleniye kak tvorchestvo*—Thought as Creativity—by V. S. Bibler, Moscow, 1975).

It is precisely in this way—through conjecture questioning and hypothesis—that Diderot succeed in going beyond the confines of mechanistic logic.

CHAPTER THREE

THE USEFUL OR THE BEAUTIFUL? THE PARADOX OF ACTING

Diderot's aesthetic ideas reflected the struggle between the emerging realistic trend in art and the French Classical school that had taken shape by the 1740s. This struggle was being waged in all of arts: theatre, drama theory, music, poetry and painting. Yet, in order to understand its real content it is necessary at least to comprehend in broad outline the phenomenon of the historicity of art, i.e. the dependence of style, genre and the aesthetic ideal itself on the given historical situation.

From the political point of view the first half of the seventeenth century in France can be summarized as the period in which the domination of absolutism became established. By this time the process of the formation of the French nation was complete, a process in which, to use Karl Marx' words, an enormous role was played by the centralized power of the monarchy; in this case it was operating as a progressive force, for it provided the centre around which the whole nation came together. The monarchy demanded that all members of society be subordinate to it; first and foremost, it restricted the aspirations for independence and self-reliance to be

found among the rich and powerful nobles. As a result of this the ideal for a citizen at that time became a reasonable man who complied with the demands of the state and placed duty above his personal feelings and passions. Art, which expresses a conception of man in an aesthetic ideal, emerged in the form of Classicism in that age, in other words it set itself the task of demonstrating the necessity of subordinating the individual to the voice of reason and duty. This does not mean, of course, that art subordinates itself to politics, deliberately aiming to foster in man any specific character traits. Art moulds a specific individual, presenting in its creations an ideal that corresponds to a given age and which has taken shape in the sharp collisions and clashes with the past. Gradually people capable of subordinating their feelings to what they themselves considered to be their duty, were coming to be considered the heroes of works of art. As the individual sacrifices himself to duty, his sacrifice is accompanied by a good deal of inner suffering, and that is how the genre of tragedy became predominant in Classicism. In their quests for fitting artistic heroes the French Classicists turned to the Antiquity, from which all subsequent ages had gleaned material; however, French noblemen are only thinly disguised in the figures of the heroes of ancient times in Classical tragedy, noblemen who took from the heroes of old strength of will, the capacity for self-sacrifice and contempt for death. In the tragedies of Corneille and Racine French Classicism reaches its apogee.

The content determines the artistic form which, in this case, tends towards the rationalistic—to a strict discipline of reason, to the subordination of the artist to a set of general rules which were considered to be the laws of "universal reason" and among which were the famous stipulations of the Three Unities —unity of action, place and time.

It should be borne in mind that Classicism itself came into being as a reaction to the tragi-comic genre that had been predominant prior to it, in which there was no common narrative thread. In the expositions found in this genre there was included an enormous chain of coincidences making it impossible to single out a clear-cut plot: the story could spread over whole years and roam from one country to another. The Classicists, on the other hand, insisted on a single story line which, in order to remain sufficiently clear, needed to unfold within a short period of time and in a single place. They did a great deal also for the reform of the French language, purifying it by eliminating various mediaeval turns of phrase and bringing it nearer to colloquial speech.

When representatives of the Third Estate step out onto the historical arena, the state of affairs in art changes radically: art is confronted with new tasks connected with the elaboration of a new aesthetic ideal. The high style of the tragedy begins to appear pompous, the characters stilted and the rules too formal; the decline of Classicism is also reflected in the emergence of two trends within it, namely, the so-called salon Classicism, represent-

ed by, among others, Prosper Crébillon, and the New Classicism propagating the principles of the Enlightenment through the lips of Roman heroes. This second trend was headed by Voltaire. Yet Voltaire's Classicism was, in its turn, only a transitional phenomenon: new heroes were needed in the world of art and it was Denis Diderot who attempted to delineate what they should be.

His recommendations to this end constituted what was essentially a programme for a new departure in art—for Realism, the main demand of which was to be an imitation of life, of Nature.

But in Classicism too one of its principles had been a demand for "imitation of life"; the crux of the matter, however, lay in the fact that in the course of time the understanding of what life was had undergone a change. In the minds of the ideologists of the Third Estate, who saw their historic mission to lie not in consolidating statehood (i.e. above all the power of the monarchy), but rather in loosening it. Life was understood as the life of the Third Estate, and the middle bourgeoisie provided the model for the "natural man" of the Enlightenment. In connection with this shift of emphasis the new theoreticians in the world of art saw the purpose of art to be propagation of those "civic virtues" that would be tantamount to bourgeois virtues. Nevertheless in that early period of the rise of the bourgeoisie the qualities admired appeared to be those of universally acknowledged humanity, and in some respects they were indeed just that.

To depict life as it really is, as man senses it, perceives it, meant, from the point of view of the French Enlightenment, upholding the rights of "natural man" and at the same time realistically depicting Nature. An aesthetic programme of French materialism had been drawn up by Diderot in 1751 in his article "Du Beau absolu" (On Absolute Beauty) which he had written for the *Encyclopédie*. A definition of the beautiful is provided here side by side with a distinction between the objective and the subjective, which is completely in keeping with the spirit of materialism: outside me there exists what must be designated the objectively beautiful, and which, as it influences me, awakes within me an idea of the beautiful. The basis for the objectively beautiful is the correlation between the parts of an object: "So I call *beautiful* outside me, all that contains within itself that which arouses within my mind the idea of correlation, and I call *beautiful* in relation to myself all that which arouses that idea".[1] According to Diderot, man is born into the world with the capacity to feel and to think: as soon as we encounter objects, within us there are born concepts of proportionality, symmetry, combinations, relations: "the perception of relations is the foundation of the *beautiful*"[2].

A beautiful building is beautiful regardless of whether someone is beholding it or not; however, it is of course only beautiful for

[1] D. Diderot, *Œuvres esthètiques*, Editions Garnier Frères, Paris, 1959, p. 418.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 428.

beings who, like us, possess both a body and reason. That which exists *per se* in Nature is objectively beautiful: it finds expression through comparison with other objects as relatively beautiful. Admittedly there is another problem which arises here: if the basis of the beautiful lies in the correlation of the parts of an object, then not a single object in Nature can be called ugly, because in each object the parts are linked in a specific way one with another. Nevertheless we use the concept of ugly, and set it off against the beautiful. Diderot himself points this out, yet he does not come forward with a clear answer to the question which he himself has raised. All he does is repeat again that, although the relation of the parts is established in the mind, the basis for doing so is to be found in sensations, i.e. he again underlines the basic premise for sensationalist materialism.

The demand that an object be depicted "as it is" coincides with the appeal that the artist imitate Nature: these thoughts emerge with more clarity in Diderot's works on dramatic art. His positive programme is elaborated side by side with his critique of Classicism. Diderot directs particularly virulent attacks against the way actors walk, talk, dress in the manner of Roman heroes, as interpreted by the French Classicists.

Diderot demands first and foremost simplicity and "naturalness", and this means that as he ousts Classical tragedy, a different genre then assumes pride of place.

One of the characteristic features of Classicism was the very strict demarcation be-

tween the various genres: high style—odes, tragedies and epics—could on no account be mixed with low style—satire, comedy, or fables. But Diderot deliberately mixed them and brought to the fore a genre that was between the two—"serious comedy". (Later in Europe such drama was to develop as so-called bourgeois drama.) Its main characters had to be representatives of the Third Estate and its aim had to be to illustrate and display bourgeois civic virtues.

Diderot does not reject out of hand the whole of Classical tragedy, of course: he has a high opinion of Corneille and Racine. He is also full of praise for the tragedians of Ancient Greece, whose main attributes are simplicity and naturalness. While examining the characters found in the art of Classical antiquity, Diderot divests them of their outer trappings and sees ordinary people, for whom nothing human is alien. He finds in Classical art perfection and completeness, serenity, elegance of form and depth of content. The Greeks, to use Diderot's words, expressed all human feelings so convincingly that, even now, we are bound to acknowledge that we can experience them just as Homer did.

In Diderot's opinion, Classicism, now that it was in decline, had completely lost all traces of simplicity and naturalness: Classicism was demanding now that artists should not imitate Nature in the way the Greeks had done, but that they should copy the models created by the writers of Classical antiquity. It was against this practice that Diderot directed his main criticism. He proposed a new classifi-

cation of genres, retaining the genres of tragedy and comedy, but introducing intermediate genres and in this way bringing closer together the two extremes. Diderot insisted that the literary language and also the style of acting used in the contemporary theatre be simplified, and he demanded simpler costumes and sets. As regards the rules of dramatic theory he came to the conclusion that they should be followed to a certain extent, i.e. that they should be acknowledged, but that they need not constrict the artist: a writer or artist of genius ought to have the right to set up new canons in art. He considered it expedient to replace delineation of situations in drama with delineation of character. This proposal ties in with the idea previoulsly expressed by Diderot to the effect that it was impossible to predict the behaviour of a human being on the basis of basic information; Diderot was convinced that the character of the individual develops in the course of dialogue of the individual with himself and his dialogue with other men, and that therefore it was more truthful to depict characters in a variety of situations. While in Classical tragedy it had been the practice only to unfold such conflict as had come to light at the very beginning of the play, so that there could be no question of development of character, in the new genre—"serious comedy"—characters would develop as they came up against various people and situations.

The theory behind this new art is expounded by Diderot in the works written at the same time as his plays, namely *Entretiens sur*

le fils naturel (Conversations about "The Natural Son"), *De la poésie dramatique* (On Dramatic Poetry) and *Le Père de famille* (The Head of the Family). It should be borne in mind that Diderot's plays *Le Fils naturel, Le Père de famille* and *Est-il bon? Est-il méchant?* (Is He Good or Is He Evil?) did not enjoy any great success on the French stage, although they were written completely in keeping with Diderot's theoretical principles and were meant to demonstrate their usefulness. This was explained later by the fact that in these plays, which were subordinated to the utilitarian goal of openly propagating bourgeois "virtues", art to a certain extent was turned into a "simple mouthpiece for the spirit of the times" and thus ceased to perform its function of shaping the individual, who could not be reduced to the average bourgeois. A certain narrowness is also to be discerned in Diderot's theoretical views on questions of dramatic art; however, thanks to the originality of his thinking he was able to go beyond that narrow framework and create real works of art, while attempting at the same time to interpret the essence of art in the age of the Enlightenment.

As mentioned earlier, the thinkers of the Enlightenment set themselves the task of imparting to all men, from monarchs to ordinary mortals clear views of what man was and the relations he should have with his fellows. They saw their vocation to lie in this and subordinated all their actions to this end. In keeping with these views, art was called upon first and foremost to play an educational role.

It helps to purify morals, to encourage man to do good and to hold in check outbursts of passion so disastrous for society, when its citizens are oppressed by tyranny and deprived of freedom. A longing for activity in such conditions can give rise to violent, all-consuming force, whereas art calms men, substituting illusions for reality and thus avoiding such eventualities.

According to the men of the Enlightenment, what is of benefit to society and educates men to be good and honest citizens, inspiring in them a sense of duty and love for one another, constitutes a work of art. According to their definitions beauty goes hand in hand with what is socially useful. In complete accordance with this Diderot writes that "what is true, what is good and what is beautiful are closely allied to one another"; "add to one of the first two qualities any rare brilliant circumstance and then the true will be beautiful and the good will be beautiful."[1] Of course a forest is beautiful, a rock is beautiful, drops of water are beautiful when transformed by the sun into a cascade of sparkling diamonds, and the sight of a torrent cascading down from mountains is also beautiful, but "these willows, this cottage, these animals which graze roundabout—all this *spectacle of usefulness*—does not it add something to my pleasure?"[2] (my italics—*T.D.*).

In Diderot's view the aesthetic perception of the philosopher differs from the aesthetic

[1] Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture,* Fr. Buisson, Paris, 1795, pp. 111-112.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

perception of the ordinary mortal in that only the philosopher is capable of seeing in a tree growing wild in the forest the mast that is destined to protect him from storms and winds, in a rock the slab of stone which will go to make palaces and churches, in waters the fertility or arid demise of fields, and so on and so forth. In this way aesthetic pleasure is rooted in an understanding of what is useful to man in any particular object: "The good is only what is useful elevated by circumstances that are possible and marvellous".[1]

The same applies to truth, since only truth can bring benefit to man: "The beautiful is only what is true, elevated by circumstances that are possible, but at the same time rare and marvellous".[2]

Such is Diderot's profound conviction, to the effect namely that truth and virtue are the handmaidens of art. If you wish to become an artist or critic, first it is necessary to become a virtuous man, Diderot urges his readers, otherwise what can be expected of an individual, who is not capable of profound experience, for indeed it is only truth and virtue that can give man profound experiences.

Diderot demands of the theatre that it provide instructive spectacles that are useful to man: "The stalls of a theatre is the only place where the tears of the virtuous man and the evil man merge together. In that place the evil man grows angry at the injustices that he

[1] Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture,* Editions sociales, Paris, 1955, p. 198.

[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 10, p. 223.

might have committed; he sympathizes with the sufferings that he might have caused and he grows indignant against a man with a character like his own. Yet the impression has been conveyed: it remains within us, despite ourselves. The evil man leaves his box, less inclined to do evil, than if he had been berated by a hard, stern orator."[1] What can be more precious than art, which imperceptibly associates us with the destiny of an honest man, wresting us from our peaceful lives in order to introduce us to the misadventures of honesty. What a blessing it would be for mankind if all imitative arts set themselves the common goal of advocating hatred of vice and love of goodness. Diderot assures his readers that if geniuses were to pay heed to that, then soon images of depravity would disappear from the walls of our palaces, and good taste and morals would benefit from this; this conviction on Diderot's part was later to exert an important influence on the finest representatives of not only the French but also the German Enlightenment. In keeping with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's ideas Diderot wrote that the theatre should be a school for a moral world, that its task was to mend the ways of the common people, rather than to consolidate its prejudices.

It was precisely this conviction which led Diderot to refer to Jean Baptiste Greuze as "his man". In his work *Salons ... de 1759-1761-1763,* which Diderot wrote as correspondent to the journal published by his friend

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 4, p. 446.

Friedrich Melchior von Grimm on exhibitions of French painting between 1759 and 1781, Greuze is accorded an important place. His pictures "The Paralytic, or Fruits of a Good Education", "The Country Bride" and "Girl Mourning a Bird" are praised by Diderot above all on account of their essential edifying quality.

The letters in *Salons...* clearly illustrate Diderot's sensitive artistic taste and the masterly elegance of his style, which led A. Schlegel to comment on one occasion that to possess a collection of paintings complete with Diderot's description of them all would be a truly royal luxury. He is able to describe a picture in such a way that we can see it before us with vivid clarity. He intersperses his impressions with digressions into the sphere of the history of philosophy and art so that *Salons...* can be considered the start of a new trend in aesthetics—namely art criticism.

In *Salons...* Diderot refers to Greuze as "his man", considering that his merit lies in the fact that he was the first to make so bold as to introduce into art scenes of every-day life. Greuze depicted ordinary men as they actually were—kind, honest and fair—and he propagated virtue through his work. All this is beautiful because his pictures are life itself, truth and honesty. Diderot wrote: "First of all the genre itself is something I like; this is moral painting. And why not? Has not the artist's brush devoted itself long enough, indeed too long, to debauchery and vice? Ought we not to feel content to see it at last rival dramatic art in moving us, instructing us,

mending our ways and inviting us to follow the path of virtue? Take heart, Greuze my friend, fill your painting with a moral message and may you always continue to do so!"[1]

Diderot's point of view was clear: only what was useful and true could be beautiful. The task of art was to mould moral men, honest and virtuous citizens who would also be responsive to others in their private lives. Yet here a doubt began to surface: after all, moral attitudes could be fostered without the help of art as well, through good and instructive examples. If art exerts some kind of influence on our moral qualities, that influence is not direct but indirect: art cannot be seen as synonymous with morality, otherwise it would be impossible to explain why man's aesthetic sense is aroused not only by that which is beautiful, but also by things which from that point of view are of no interest for him. Indeed, if it is possible to agree at least in part with the contention that aesthetic pleasure at the sight of a shapely pine or birch-tree is enhanced by an awareness of the usefulness which the trees might provide for man, then why is our delight called forth by totally useless ornamentation, a butterfly, or even a simple combination of various colours? We also delight in pictures based on mythological subjects, or works of drama and poetry which we know from the outset to contain subject-matter that is unreliable from the scientific point of view. Perhaps the true, the good and the beautiful are not quite as inseparably

[1] Diderot, *Salons de 1759-1761-1763*, Flammarion, Paris, 1967, p. 159.

linked with each other after all? In his *Lettre sur les aveugles,à l'usage de ceux qui voient* (Letter on the Blind, for the Use of Those Who See) Diderot expressed pity for the blind precisely in connection with the fact that for them beauty "is no more than an empty word, if it is divorced from usefulness".[1] He goes on to exclaim that it is surely a pity that the blind regard beauty and usefulness as one and the same thing, and that so many remarkable things are thus lost for the blind.

As is to be seen from the above, the first contradiction in Diderot's aesthetic views lies in the fact that with the same passion, with which he previously demonstrated that the true, the good and the beautiful are allied to one another so closely as to be almost one and the same thing, he now draws absolute distinctions between them, admitting after all that the beautiful is neither useful nor truthful from the scientific point of view.

Yes, Greuze was Diderot's man, and he was deserving of wide recognition: he extolled truth and virtue in his work and condemned vice. Yet how pleasing was the work of François Boucher in which there was neither truth nor morality to be found! While moving away from his pictures Diderot could not help looking round at them again, and, while condemning them, he could not help delighting in them. "What colours! What diversity! What a wealth of subjects and ideas!" exclaimed the enraptured Diderot, marvelling at the fact that there was everything to be found in the

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 1, p. 286.

works of that artist apart from truth. The pictures of Boucher, to use Diderot's turn of phrase, were characterised above all by a futile accumulation of details, yet the beholder, while appreciating with his reason all their absurdity, was at the same time unable to tear his eyes away from them. The beholder's gaze is riveted to them, and he keeps returning to them. "They are an oddity so pleasant, an extravagance so inimitable, so rare! There is so much imagination, impact, so much magic and skill!"[1]

So Diderot delights in something that is futile and that is not laudable from the moral point of view. In the pictures of Boucher there is no truth, no morality, yet strange as it might seem they do not appear to lose anything as a result. Despite his better judgement Diderot seems compelled to acknowledge the independence of aesthetic judgements. Beauty is not the same as truth and it is not the same as usefulness... Although Boucher does not set out to extol virtue and to expose vice, with the greatest of ease he overcomes all difficulties that might beset the painter, and no painter has mastered the secrets of light and shade better than he. This contradiction in Diderot's conception of the beautiful can be seen in the statements made by Diderot in connection with one of Boucher's pictures depicting the Nativity: "I would not be averse to possessing this picture. Every time you would come to see me, you would criticize it but you would find yourself looking at it"[2]. Boucher

[1] Diderot, *Salons...*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
[2] Ibid., p. 26.

was referred to as the "magical painter", although he did not possess a single one of those qualities inherent in the work of Greuze, by which Diderot set so much store. When analyzing two pictures by Boucher—"Sleeping Infant Jesus" and "The Sheep-Fold"—Diderot unexpectedly drew the conclusion that art can disregard truth and nevertheless still be art. Moreover, precisely because art does not strive after truth, but on the contrary is always, as it were, bound up with invention, Boucher, in response to the reproach that his figures are not true to life, is able to answer with every justification that that is of no concern to him whatsoever.

This contradiction compels Diderot to look for a new answer to the question as to what should be regarded as a work of art—a portrait that is badly painted but provides a likeness of the original in every respect, as for example a portrait of Henry IV, or a wonderfully executed portrait of some ne'er-do-well, extortioner, or the author of some stupid little book and so on and so forth. Can we really be aware of what it is that attracts us to busts of Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, or Cicero: is it the skilled carver or the similarity between the bust and the original?

Truth and usefulness; on the one hand, or invention and uselessness, on the other: therein lies the question which Diderot is all the time trying to solve and then asking yet again. On the one hand truth in art involves the demand that Nature should be depicted as it really is. In this sense the beautiful is the same as "the natural" (here we come up against this

term yet again but already on a different plane) and the artist is he who imitates Nature. Diderot was to write that "the more the imitation might be perfect and the more analagous to the original, the more satisfied we would then be".[1] "It is clear that the depiction of Nature is not seen as a complex task since it is very difficult not to see Nature as it really is".[2] If Nature were imitated meticulously, then there would be nothing mannered about any drawing or use of colour, for mannerisms are fostered by teachers, academicians and art schools. A few years later Goethe would be criticizing Diderot for bringing art and Nature too close together and, by doing so, robbing art of what sets it apart from all else. Diderot, however, insists to himself that he should provide an explanation for the fact that artists sometimes depict one and the same subject in different ways. He tries to explain this with reference to the structure of the eye which can vary from one person to another, and also to differences in human character and moods. Yet if that is how things really stand, then perceiving Nature "as it really is", is a far from easy task. Indeed what is Nature like? In his subsequent reasoning Diderot gradually comes round to the idea that the artist always depicts objects in the style of a particular school. Consequently what is important is not so much the ability of the eyes to see, but rather the special way of depicting an object, which will differ from one school of painting to another. He who

[1] Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture, op. cit.*, p. 3.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

imitates Louis Jean François Lagrenée, for example, will, according to Diderot, paint in a vivid dense manner, while he who imitates Jean Baptiste Le Prince will use reddish and reddish-brown tones, he who imitates Greuze will use greys and mauves, and so on and so forth.

Why do various artists use different styles of painting? Diderot answers this question without the slightest hesitation: it is because each one of them has his own particular inner world, a world of fictitious characters, which he transfers to canvas and through which he influences Nature. At this point Diderot provides a definition of the beautiful and art in general that differs from those he used before, since he is by this time sure that the artist transfers to canvas the fantastic, invented image, and that thanks to this, far from slavishly copying Nature, he is placing on Nature the stamp of his own individuality. Thus we cannot deny that art embellishes Nature, since we ourselves, when we delight in a woman say that she is like Raphael's Madonna, or when we look at a beautiful landscape that it is Romantic.

If art were to be no more than an imitation of Nature, then the painting of pictures would be a fairly easy undertaking (and indeed we may recall that Diderot did in fact mention that it was not difficult). However, the opposite would also be true since an artist does not merely look around him and depict what he sees: "he has to stroll about, meditate, leave his brushes to one side and *remain inactive* until such time as the great idea be ready"

(my italics—*T.D.*; compare with Pushkin: "Idle freedom goes hand in hand with contemplation...").[1] The next extract from *Salons...* elucidates the role attached by Diderot to the product of the artist's imagination, which he refers to as the ideal prototype: "There is a primitive model *that is not to be found in Nature at all* and which only exists in a vague, blurred form in the mind of the artist. Between the most perfect creation of Nature and this primitive, vague model there is to be found a space within which the artist's creative freedom is confined. Hence the different styles peculiar to the various schools, and peculiar to certain distinguished masters within one and the same school, styles of drawing, shading, colouring, draping, arrangement and expression: all are good, all are more or less close to the ideal model. The Venus de Médicis is beautiful, Falconet's statue 'Pygmalion' is beautiful. It would, however, appear that these are two different sorts of beautiful woman" (my italics—*T.D.*).[2]

So the style of an artist's painting depends in the final analysis on the ideal, invented image. Taste, according to Diderot, was always "balancing on the razor's edge". Yet it is not clear how the artist is to find this dividing line, for "between the beauty of form and its deformation the distance is no more than a hair's breadth: how is it that artists have acquired that quick intuition that it is essential to have, if they are to find the separate beautiful scattered parts so as to create from

[1] Diderot, *Salons...*, p. 16.

[2] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot*, Vol. 10, p. 108.

them a whole? That is the crucial question."[1] This question that worried Diderot so much, was raised by him so many times that it provides ample illustration of his dissatisfaction with the answer that could be provided within the framework of mechanistic materialism. If an artist depicts not so much Nature *per se,* but *Nature as seen through the prism of his ideal image,* then the whole question centres round how that image comes into being. The seemingly simple explanation to the effect that the artist takes the most beautiful parts from various natural models and then links them together in one whole does not satisfy Diderot because of its mechanistic nature. After all, in order to know what should be linked together and how, an artist already needed to have an idea of the beautiful whole, which was not to be found in Nature. Diderot wrote in *Salons...*: "It is an old story, my friend, that in order to create a real statue or an imaginary one, which the Ancients called the Rule and which I call the ideal model or the true line, they studied Nature, borrowing from its infinite array of individuals the most beautiful parts from which they put together the whole. How would they have recognized the beauty of those parts? Particularly the beauty of those parts which are rarely exposed to our eyes, such as the belly, the lower back, thigh and shoulder joints, the beauty of which is felt *poco piu, poco meno* (to a greater or lesser extent) by only a small number of artists and which are not considered

[1] *Œuvres complètes de Diderot,* Vol. 9, p. 23.

beautiful by popular opinion that is already firmly established when the artist is born and that predetermines his judgement"[1]. For Diderot it is still not clear how the notion of the beautiful ideal takes shape, but for him it is quite evident that it cannot be the product of mere contemplation of Nature, but constitutes the result of the artist's creative imagination. The true line and the ideal image of beauty, he reminds us, existed only in the minds of such people as Agasias of Ephesus, Raphael, Poussin, Puget, Pigalle, Falconet, but the great masters did not succeed in passing on that conception to their pupils.

It is precisely that ideal model created by the great artist which, in Diderot's opinion, fosters the character and good taste of a whole people, of an era and, on a smaller scale, of schools of art. Art is based not so much on the imitation of Nature (and consequently it is inadequate to define the beautiful as the "natural"), as on imitation of the model that is to be found in the mind (or in the heart) of the artist. Good taste, balancing "on the razor's edge", is shaped by loyalty to the model created by the artist, and if pedantic imitation of Nature makes art wretched, poor and trivial, in that case it is the departure from the prototype in the artist's mind or heart which gives rise to mannered style and hypocrisy.

In this way the contradiction between "imitation of Nature" and "invention" unfolds into a paradox between the "natural" and the "artificial", on which Diderot focusses

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

his attention in his work *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (The Paradox of Acting—extracts of which were published in 1770, which was completed in 1773 but was never published in full during Diderot's lifetime).

Paradoxes are to be found right through all the issues of *Salons* , on which Diderot worked from 1759 to 1781, and "this paradoxality, which tended to be something quite spontaneous and involuntary in the early *Salons*... comes to be something, of which Diderot grows steadily more aware, which starts to torment him, upset the balance of his aesthetic principles and to drive him to attempts at self-analysis".[1]

While the contradictions found in *Salons* are often concealed within a mass of material relating to tangible, specific works of art, *Paradoxe sur le comédien* is an attempt to consciously reflect on those contradictions. The non-coincidence of truth and invention is presented here as the contrast between natural sensitivity and the skill of the actor. In this work Diderot discusses the style of acting, and instances when the actor's performance is most convincing—i.e. when he merges so closely with the character he is portraying (to use Stanislavsky's words, when he has "penetrated the feelings" of the character) that he is no longer separate from that character, or when the actor not only "lives" the character, but is constantly checking his acting as if from an outsider's viewpoint (a prac-

[1] V. S. Bibler, *The Age of the Enlightenment and a Critique of Reason: Diderot and Kant*, Moscow, 1980, p. 31 (in Russian).

tice which is nearer to the practice of actors in Brecht's theatre). In which case does he have the most powerful impact on the spectator?

In *Paradoxe...* Diderot once more presents us with an argument, with two different opinions presented in the form peculiar to so much of his work, namely dialogue. One of the participants in the dialogue considers that an actor can only have an impact on his audience when he transforms himself utterly into the character he is portraying: the partner in the dialogue maintains that this is never possible. If it was enough for the actor to be sensitive, how could he play one and the same part twice in a row with equal intensity and success?—Diderot asks. If too emotional in the first performance, he will have burnt himself out by the third and become as cold as marble. It is not possible to expect any consistency from "sensitive actors", i.e. those who rely on emotions rather than their mind: one minute their acting will be powerful, the next weak, one minute banal and the next elevated; today they will fail in a part of the play in which they excelled yesterday, and tomorrow they will excel where they failed today. Meanwhile the actor for whom reason is preeminent will be consistent in all performances, because everything has been worked out and assessed in his mind in advance, before the performance, and when actually on stage he only introduces minor corrections to his rendering of his part. The rational actor is constantly observing the audience's response to his playing and is constantly keeping

a check on himself; thanks to this he will make his rendering of the part either more passionate or cooler, but each time he knows what he is aiming at, and for this reason succeeds in pleasing us.

"What!" explains one protagonist. "Those pathetic notes of grief brought forth by the mother from the depths of her being and which touched me to the quick did not spring from genuine emotion? And it was not true despair that gave rise to them? Why then should I go to the theatre—to observe pretence?"

"Yes," replies the other, "but that pretence which creates in you the illusion of reality is real acting. A demonstration of this is provided by the fact that the sounds uttered by an actor are measured, they are part of a method for voice projection; if they are but the twentieth part of a tone higher or lower they would ring false, they are subject to laws of unity and in order for them to ring true they are rehearsed hundreds of times."

On this subject Diderot presents us with a subtle dialogue, in which one protagonist, appearing to make concessions to the other, agrees with him on the point that the artist, who in the main imitates passions, has to remain natural at those moments when, forgetting himself, he weeps bitterly on stage. Acceptance of this fact is then followed by an insidious question from his interlocutor, as to whether the weeping is measured. This question obliges the other to reply in the affirmative, because if that were not the case, then it would be impossible for a company of actors to work together as a close-knit team.

In this case, however, there can be no question of "natural" acting.

An actor's talent lies not in feeling, but in conveying the outward signs of feeling so convincingly as to persuade his audience that the feeling is genuine. Let us imagine, suggests Diderot, that an actress has at her command the degree of sensitivity which Art, taken to its extreme limits, can depict. Yet the theatre demands the imitation of so many characters and in each part there are moments so contradictory, that a person with an exceptional ability to weep would be incapable of depicting more than one character and only be effective at a few moments in his one and only part... Diderot then concludes that to be sensitive by nature is one thing and feeling is another: the first attribute belongs to man as a natural creature, and the second is the fruit of his intellect. Elaborating an integrated system for voice projection and gestures and creating a properly rounded character is only possible in the cold light of reason, profound reflection, refined taste, hard work, long experience and rare feats of memory. All these qualities come together in the great artist, an example of which can be provided by the English actor, David Garrick. Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comèdien* had in fact been written to express the ideas that had been prompted by a brochure devoted to that actor, and Diderot quotes on more than one occasion Garrick's own words about acting, in which he stresses that Garrick can play a scene from a comedy one moment and straight afterwards a scene from a tragedy, laughing or crying

depending upon the words he is delivering, and that both scenes will be equally effective and realistic. Yet surely men cannot really laugh or cry to order? They only create the illusion of so doing, and with a greater or lesser degree of effectiveness, depending upon whether the actor in question is a man like Garrick or an inferior performer. If an actor had to suffer in all sincerity on stage every time, he would not have the necessary strength to do so and he could indeed say to the audience: "I have things other than the cares of Agamemnon to weep about".[1]

Diderot goes on to point out that what we, the audience, wish is that the hero should die on stage like a Roman gladiator, gracefully and nobly, in an elegant, picturesque pose. Such a death would be classified as convincing in the theatre and does not imply in the slightest that on stage a man should behave in the same way as he does in real life. Then comes the question: who fulfils these demands best? He who merely feels or the actor who has the skill to convey feelings? Diderot concludes that the great actor, like the great gladiator, does not die in the same way as men die in their beds: in order to please us they have to portray a different life so that the spectator himself appreciates that "naked truth, action stripped of all embellishment, would be mean and contrast with the poetry of the whole".[2]

When summing up his ideas Diderot inter-

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[1] Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau suivi de Paradoxe sur le comédien*, Gallimard, Paris, 1966, p. 188.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

prets the real paradox facing the actor as a logically formulated situation in which the thesis is essential if the antithesis is to follow and vice versa. This paradox which is the central message of the whole work raises two questions: "If an actor is himself when he is acting, how will he cease to be himself?", and "If he wishes to cease to be himself, how will he light on the right moment when he needs to stop?"[1] Indeed an actor, like any human being, needs always to remain himself, and this applies to the times when he is on stage as well; however, when transforming himself into another character he ceases to be himself. Nevertheless, only because—even when he is dying like Caesar, or weeping like King Lear—he remains an actor rather than Caesar or Lear, is he able to correct shortcomings in his acting and create a still more convincing character.

The actor always seeks to embody within himself two individuals: he lives in the character he is playing and judges himself from the outside: he is himself and yet at the same time he is not himself. When he is amending his playing of a part, he is introducing changes into what is natural. As we may well recall this very same thought Diderot expressed in *Salons*. Only in cases of "split personality" is an actor an actor all the time. If he at any time behaves only in a way that is peculiar to his own nature, then he is not yet an actor (he is an ordinary man); if, on the other hand, he only indulges in reflection, without

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

transforming himself into any character, then he is no longer an actor—he is a critic.

This split serves to spotlight contradictory whole, because reflection is only possible where material for reflection is present. Consequently, in order to observe oneself from the outside, so to speak, an actor has to become an "outsider" to himself, i.e. to turn himself into another person. At the same time, in order to embody another person, an actor needs first of all to create a character and then while on stage to "keep pace" with that character. Consequently, reflection is a prerequisite for the actor's transformation of himself into another character, his penetration of another character's feelings. One follows after the other and the one is impossible without the other, or to be more precise these are two opposites—this is where the paradox lies, as Diderot phrases it, pointing to the incompatibility of the two extremes and at the same time to the way in which one determines the other.

This paradox is to be found in the work of all great actors: Clairon, for example, is great, precisely because at the very moment when she is lying back on a chaise longue in a nonchalant way, appearing not to be thinking of anything and totally at one with her heroine, in reality she is all the time keeping a check on herself, seeing and hearing herself as if from outside, judging her performance and the impact it is having on the audience. "At that moment she is twofold: little Clairon and the great Agrippine."[1]

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

While, in order to depict the life of a character it is perhaps imperative first and foremost to be sensitive, in order to create a character and constantly to be judging his own performance, an actor needs intellect and imagination, because he is embodying on stage his own ideal prototype, the product of his own creative imagination. The productive capacity of the imagination enables the actor to create a character even more powerful and expressive than that invented by the playwright himself. It was no coincidence that Voltaire, after seeing Clairon in one of his plays, exclaimed: "Is it really I who made that?" Diderot relates this incident, goes on to ask where in fact Clairon's talent lay and he then proceeds to answer his own question: "It was *the talent to imagine a great phantom and to copy it like a genius*" (my italics—*T.D.*).[1] Clairon was not copying the people she saw around her, but imitating the movements and the words of a being which she herself had invented. But was not her ideal image a phantom? This question Diderot answers in the negative, without the slightest hesitation. Despite the fact that it is in the mind, it exists; admittedly, the question as to how it actually takes shape constitutes an insoluble difficulty for Diderot as was the case in *Salons*. Yet an actor always creates such characters and each one of them he creates in his own way. After all, the Cleopatras, Méropes, Agrippines and Cinnas we encounter in the theatre are not

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

real people, but invented poetic phantoms.

Diderot devoted a good deal of space to imagination, without which, in his opinion, not a single artistic image could come into being, although even with the help of imagination, it is difficult to explain to oneself the complex process by which such an image takes shape. Imagination, exclaims Diderot, is something without which it is impossible to be either poet, philosopher, an intelligent man or even a human being. A man bereft of imagination would, to use Diderot's expression, be simply a blockhead, whose intellectual activity would be reduced to no more than the production of sounds that he learns to combine when still a child and mechanically continues to use in all situations in which life places him. It is imagination that sets skill apart from simple imitation of Nature and the difference between Nature and Art is rooted precisely in imagination. Thanks to the ideal created in the mind by the imagination of the artist, art becomes a reality that is no less significant than Nature itself. If an artist only depicts what he sees, then his work is not yet art: in his picture there is natural truthfulness, as is to be found in the statue of a sculptor who conveys with precision mean nature, for although everyone may take delight in this truthfulness, the work will nevertheless appear pitiable. It is because of this that Diderot finally draws the paradoxical, but nevertheless—for the Age of the Enlightenment—essential conclusion: "The character drawn from Nature is of lesser stature than the character depicted by the poet, and the

latter in his turn is of lesser stature than the character invented by the great actor, which is the most exaggerated of all. The actor's invention stands aloft the shoulders of the writer's and is encased within a large wicker dummy of which he is the soul".[1] ...To Diderot it even seems possible to maintain that "nature's truth is at odds with the truth of convention".[2] The contradiction between the "natural" and the "artificial" is now revealed to us as the paradox between Nature and Freedom, to use Kant's words. And indeed, Diderot's aesthetics represent the beginning of the path that was to lead to Kant's antinomies of taste.

The resemblance to be found between the ideas of Kant and those of Diderot manifests itself first and foremost in the fact that the former, as indeed somewhat later Kant as well, discerned—or to be more precise, guessed—the unattractive bourgeois essence of the theory of utility, and this enabled him to reject the utilitarian interpretation of art and, in the final analysis, to define the beautiful as something which cannot be used. After starting out from the assertion that the beautiful is the useful, Diderot ends up by presenting these two concepts as totally separate. This difference was expressed most clearly of all by Kant when he acknowledged the disinterested nature of aesthetic judgement. Kant insists that aesthetic perception and the whole sphere of art have nothing to do with utility and when the question is asked as to whether so-

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 217.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 218.

mething is beautiful or not, what people really want to know is not whether the existence of a thing is important or could be important for them or for anyone else, but how to judge a thing after simply looking at it. Kant notes that he could, of course, answer like the Iroquois chief who enjoyed nothing else in Paris as much as the eating-houses, or that he could also, utterly in the spirit of Rousseau, censure the vanity of grandees who spare no sweat of the people to acquire such things as they could well do without. Finally, he could admit that if he were on an uninhabited island it would be enough for him to build a simple and comfortable hut, rather than to aspire to build a palace. All such statements can of course be accorded both our acknowledgement and our approval. The point at issue, however, is rather different: to be precise, what is required is to establish whether he could derive pleasure from an object, from which he does not expect any advantage and to which in this respect he is totally indifferent. Without doubt "flowers, free drawings, lines that intertwine to no specific end in a so-called leaf ornament are of no importance and they do not depend on any specific concept, and yet they are pleasing nonetheless".[1] It is possible that aesthetic delight be derived from useful objects, but the essence of that human emotion is manifested precisely in relation to something disinterested; utility and beauty are two different things. In this case reproaches

[1] Immanuel Kant, "Der Kritik der Utreilskraft", *Werke in Sechs Bänden*, Vol. 5, Isel-Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1957, p. 284.

of formalism addressed at Kant would be mistaken, since Kant does not in any way deny the content of art: the only thing he does not accept is the utilitarian exploitation of art.

Art is essential to man, for his own sake, for the sake of the development of his individuality and the fostering of those emotions and needs of the individual, which are in no way linked either with acquisition or possession. Art is of significance in relation not to utility but to "humanity", and it is precisely this fact that Diderot and Kant singled out; Kant once more starts out where Diderot left off. (This book does not set out to provide a detailed account of the aesthetic views propounded by Kant or to follow through the parallels between Diderot's and Kant's ideas. This has been done in a brilliant work by V. S. Bibler entitled *Vek Prosveshcheniya i kantovskaya kritika sposobnosti suzhdeniya* (The Age of the Enlightenment and a Critique of Man's Capacity for Judgement by Kant—published in Moscow in 1975).

In connection with what has been said so far, a similarity between the two thinkers may also be discerned in the fact that they both stressed the necessity of creativity in art and this is directly linked precisely with the development of the individual's personal characteristics. For Diderot, creativity manifested itself in the imagination, peculiar to each individual, in the creation of an ideal image in the mind of the artist, poet, or actor. For Kant it was this "productive capacity for imagination" which in his third *Critique*... no longer occupies a place subordinate to man's

other capacities, but, on the contrary, is seen as the stimulation for the activity of man's intellect and reason, as a result of which taste is defined by him as "the capacity for judgement of an object in relation to the *free conformity of the power of imagination*".[1] Thus the poet decides to make ideas stemming from his reasoning about such things as invisible beings, the Kingdom of the Blessed, the Underworld, Eternity, or Creation discernible to man; admittedly, for this task he does have at his disposal examples that can be taken from experience such as death, envy and all other vices, and, on the other hand, love and glory. Yet to express these concepts the artist goes beyond the confines of experience, trying to present to us, with the help of his imagination, things for which there are no examples to be found in Nature.

Just as Diderot before him, so Kant writes of the "ideal prototype" which everyone who is associated with art must create for himself and in comparison with which he can judge everything which provides an object, on which Man can exercise his taste.

It has been attempted here to trace some of the threads that link the French Enlightenment with the German *Aufklärung:* it has emerged that Diderot's materialist aesthetics is paradoxically transformed, as it were, into the idealist aesthetics of the German philosophers. The phrase, "as it were", is appropriate here, since alongside the many features of this resemblance, there are of course fun-

[1] I. Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

damental differences to be found. Diderot remains a materialist to whom the subject of art not only gives grounds for the unfolding of the free imagination but also is tangible reality, that always remains broader than the ideal image created by the artist in the process of his aesthetic assimilation of the world. Thanks to this not one work of art can be exhausted on the aesthetic plane, but continues to reveal to new generations new possibilities. Diderot is a realist, but his realism is not confined to an appeal for man to copy what he sees around him. To depict an object as it exists *per se,* is only possible if it is transformed, either in reality or in a mental process, with the help of creativity. This is why in the final analysis Diderot interprets "what is genuine" as imitation of the ideal prototype,[1] created by the imagination of the poet, and why he presents the imagination as the only framework within which man's aesthetic perception of the world is possible.

[1] Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau suivi de Paradoxe sur le comédien, op. cit.*, p. 157.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made here to present Diderot to the reader as an original French thinker of the eighteenth century. A special feature of his thought, stemming from its socratic spirit, we have been referring to as "paradoxality": the ability to split up any assertion into its component parts, until a contradiction is revealed among the latter, was the explanation for Diderot's success in formulating problems that extend beyond the framework of metaphysical materialism.

Diderot's philosophical views were the logical product of his age. He was not original in his positive programme, and his thoughts on matter, motion, development and so on, are closely allied to those of Legér-Marie Deschamps, whom he held in very high esteem, Holbach, La Mettrie and others. Like them Diderot came to a significant degree under the influence of Leibniz (in particular with regard to the question of homogeneous and heterogeneous matter), Spinoza and various other of his great predecessors.

As we have attempted to demonstrate, Diderot's strength lay in his exposition of ideas that were indeed very similar to the views of

many other philosophers but, strange though it may seem, in his doubts and questioning of their views, and in his ability to single out the latent behind the obvious and the contradictory behind the indisputable.

The fact that Diderot did not produce a strictly organized and polished philosophical system can on the one hand be seen as an advantage, since it made it easier for him to criticize mechanistic materialism, but on the other as a shortcoming, since to a certain extent this deprived his ideas of inner completeness.

In Diderot's socio-political programme he clearly followed an approach that was less revolutionary and less democratic than that of Rousseau. Yet despite all these weaknesses Diderot was a colourful dynamic personality endowed with an unusual mind and array of talents, to whom we owe the *Encyclopédie* and many other triumphs of the Enlightenment, and this is where his main contribution to philosophy and history lies.

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